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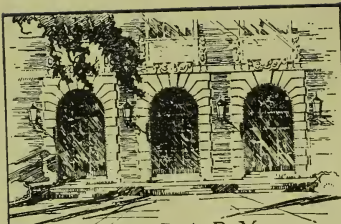
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IN A SILVER SEA.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY," "THE SACRED
NUGGET," "CHRISTMAS ANGEL," "GRIF," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN A SILVER SEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE RECORD OF RANF THE HUNCHBACK.

“COME, Ranf, while you have the power, set upon paper a sign that shall remain when you have passed away. While I live no eye but mine shall see what I write. When I am dead, it is Evangeline’s, with all that I possess. It is not that I believe I shall die to-night or to-morrow, but it is as well to think of things. It is right that Evangeline should know something of my inner life, so that she may give men the lie who speak ill of me. There are plenty of them; let them have their way, but do not let them step into mine. A spirit within me might cry ‘Strike!’ and they would not live to rue.

“No, I shall not die to-night, but I will be prepared. Only up to a certain point

are we our own masters ; though steadfastness and determination will achieve most human desires, we are for ever at the mercy of chance, which at any unexpected moment may snap the mortal thread. This morning I slipped upon a stone, and fell to a depth of a thousand feet before I recovered myself by catching at a branch of a tree which grew out of the rocks for my preservation. I slid down over the sharp stones which cut my hands when I endeavoured to clutch them, but Death was not waiting for me in the depths below. Scores of years ago a seed was blown into a crevice, and a tree grew and forced the rocks asunder, that I might be saved for my life's purpose. Those who pretend to study the science of Divine things, and who really understand them as well as a beetle, would dispute this, if it paid them to do so. I have my beliefs, and am content with them. If in the world's scheme there is any sort of design, all things possible must be admitted. Even the unseen agencies by which we are surrounded, and whose mysterious power derides our highest efforts, play their direct part in our lives. Sometimes they drive men mad.

Human judgment has passed such a verdict upon me; but I have long learnt to accept with scorn the judgment of mankind.

“I am quite calm, though sorely wounded. Bodily pain does not distress me; I can trifle with it, argue with it, laugh at it, defy it, and conquer it. I have in my time suffered torments, but it has been the anguish of the soul that has conquered me and made me groan. I am bruised and cut, and shall not be able to descend the mountain for two or three days at least.

“I saw a flower that shone like gold, with a dusky mellow lustre such as I see in the autumn sunsets as I stand upon the highest peak of this mountain of snow. Its peculiarity was that its inner cup reflected a light of burnished silver. It was not within easy reach, and I could only hope to obtain it by stepping on a large stone which projected from the outer surface of the precipice. I established a foothold, and with a firm grasp of the earth behind me, leant forward to detach the flower by its root, when the stone slipped from beneath me. I slipped

with it, and was saved by the tree. Wounded as I was, I could not possibly have reached the mountain's top by climbing the surface of the rock, but to my surprise I found in the rear of this tree an easier path to safety. It could not have been made by human hands——

“I am arrested in the current of my thoughts by a notch. Why could this hidden path not have been made by human hands? There can be no doubt that the islanders speak the truth when they say that no man but myself has ventured into these strange regions for generations. But two hundred years ago there lived upon the mount a man, self-banished, whose life was cursed by love and jealousy. He grew old here, and passed his days in loneliness, without human or other visible companionship. The mountain was his then, as it is mine now. He essayed a wonderful task, and may have cut this path to assist in its accomplishment. It is not an unreasonable idea. When I am able to move about I will convince myself whether the narrow way has been made by nature or man.

“What kind of life did he live upon this

mount? He was utterly alone ; not a living being to hold converse with. Separated from the world by an impassable gulf, dreading the future, seeking to propitiate it by tears and supplication, and self-abasement. Both fool and coward !

“ A handsome man, they say, a hero in form and purpose, wise, and strong, and capable. That is how men judge of others—by outward signs ; so do they judge of me. But I have taught them something already, and may teach them more. A new character for you to play, Ranf—a braggart. Although you are deformed and a hunchback, although your limbs are at odds with one another and you are in height but half a man, I know under what conditions you could elevate yourself into a god to be worshipped by the crowd.

“ There is a sound at my door of scratching and tearing, and now as of a body pushing with strength and violence. The door flies open.

“ It is my dog Leontine. I left her in the lower hut two days ago, and she has sought me out. She lies now at my feet, devoted and tame, as handsome and as strong as a lioness. Had she found me

dead, she would have licked my body, and perchance have shed tears over me. She has in her higher qualities than some human beings I know. I do not say this because Leontine loves me; I say it out of the depths of my life and experience.

“She thought I was in pain; she looked up at me with her great soft eyes, and, when I smiled at her to assure her that I was at my ease, she nestled down comfortably in satisfaction. What would you do for me, Leontine—fight for me, die for me? Were you a woman, would you love me? If you could speak, and answered yes, I would stab you where you lie.

“If I had been born straight, Leontine could not love me more. It is perhaps fortunate for me that I came into the world crooked and misshapen. Something is mine. The love of goats and birds and dogs is worth having—when you can’t get the love of a woman.

“Leontine, I will confess to you. You will not betray me. It is long, long ago in the past since the sunlight, peeping in upon me, stole away to flowers and blades of grass better worth ripening, and left me in the dark to thrive as best I

could. I was born in the dark, and lived in a forest, in the very depths of it, farther away from men than I am now. I have kept no count of the years. About me was a woman who said she was my mother, and gave me my name, such as no other man ever bore. I had nothing in common with human-kind. I was much alone; often for weeks together. We lived in a wretched hut, and I was left to do pretty much as I liked. Certain rules, however, were set for me. I was warned not to wander beyond a defined boundary; frightful stories were related to me of awful creatures prowling within a mile of our hut, and of what they would do to me if I ventured within their reach. I had no desire to do so; I made acquaintance with bird and beast, but not with man. I had no reason to believe that there was another child in the world besides myself. My mother, who was as hideous as I, and who never gave me a kind word, bade me, on pain of torture and death, not to show myself if any human creature came in view. When she left me, saying she would return to-morrow, or next week, or next month, I felt no

regret. Leontine, I kiss you; you are grateful; you know it is a sign of love. I love you, my dog, else I should not embrace you. I do not remember this woman ever placing her lips upon my face.

“It was no loss. I felt no need for kisses. There was enough to eat in our hut; as a child I learnt to snare birds and prepare them for the table; we had a bit of land where vegetables grew; I lived the life of an animal.

“It is almost a wonder how I learned to speak; for this at least I can thank my mother. When she was away I talked to the trees, and fancied I knew their language as their branches bent and their leaves rustled in the wind. Then I could bark like a dog. I have not done so since I have been on the isle. Listen, Leontine.

“Ha! I startled you. Here is something more. I can send my voice outside this hut, and can make you think we are surrounded by your species. Listen again.

“I have done a fine thing. Leontine is gone, searching for the bodies that gave forth those sounds. I cannot continue

without her companionship. I will wait till she returns.

“She is here, standing by my side, with a listening look in her eyes. I will fool you no more, Leontine. Go, shut the door, and rest in peace.

“The voices and songs of birds I also learned to know and imitate. I was entirely a woodland creature, and I cannot say with truth that I was unhappy; but I was conscious of a void in my life. Define it I could not; I seemed to be waiting for a sign, and even, at times, to be yearning for it. That was because I was human.

“A task was given me to perform. Beyond the boundary was a forest of deer, which gentlemen amused themselves in hunting. When a deer strayed within our boundary I was to chase it over the border. Of these events I kept a record in a small book, and it was by this means I learnt to form written characters, and, imperfectly, to read. The records were simple, and ran thus: On such a day, in the morning, afternoon, or night, there appeared a deer, of such an age. I knew the age of the deer by its antlers. It was an easy task to frighten these gentle

animals away ; but one day a deer turned and evaded me, and, when I hurt it with a stone, attacked me. I was gored and wounded badly, but the victory was mine. Then I knew that I was strong.

“My mother was terribly angry with me, and said that if the gentlemen knew I had killed a deer they would take my life.

“ ‘Or I should take theirs,’ I answered. ‘I am ready for another fight. It is rare sport.’

“ ‘You are a fool,’ my mother said ; ‘if you crossed the path of a gentleman, he would kick you aside.’

“ ‘Why would he do that?’ I asked, in curiosity.

“ ‘Look at yourself in clear water,’ replied my mother, shaking her fist at me ; ‘you are neither beast nor human.’

“I laughed at her anger ; there was nothing in it to frighten me. As to looking at myself in a clear pool, it was a thing I had never thought of doing ; no fair stream of water lay within our boundary. But when my laughter ceased, I became thoughtful and moody, and my mother’s words, carrying in them a sting I

did not rightly comprehend, rankled in my mind a long time afterwards.

“Growing bolder with years, and less willing to be told I must go here and must not go there, and still less willing to obey, I plunged beyond the boundary, and came upon a building of stone, surrounded by a neglected garden. There were fruit-trees in it, still bearing, and as I ate some of the fruit, I looked admiringly at the stained and painted windows and at the beautiful house, the like of which I had never seen before.

“‘Who lives here?’ I asked myself. ‘One of those gentlemen who would kick me from his path if I crossed it?’

“I knocked at the doors, without receiving an answer; I tried gates and windows, and found them fast. There were pillars in the principal entrance, reaching to a verandah, stretching out from some of the handsomest windows in the building. Determined to see the inside of the house, I climbed up one of these pillars, and stepped on to the verandah. One of the windows was loose; without breaking it I managed to open it, and by that means obtained

entrance. The house was entirely deserted ; not a sign of life was visible, with the exception of spider-webs in all the corners. The walls were hung with beautiful pictures, the furniture was gold and velvet, I could not hear my footfall as I walked on the thick pile-carpets. I strolled through the rooms in a kind of dream, and came to one into which the full sunlight was pouring. It was a bedroom, with delicate fripperies in it which I handled with care. There were two pictures in this room which fixed my attention ; one of a gentleman, dressed in court fashion, the other of a lovely young girl. The faces in both the pictures singularly affected me. The features of the girl were faultlessly beautiful ; the handsome mouth of the gentleman was opened, and showed his regular white teeth, his hands were delicately shaped, and there was an air of distinction about him which was new to me. I passed my hand over my face, and was seized by a longing to look at myself in clear water, as my mother had bid me do. I turned to a table upon which stood a mirror, the first I had

ever seen, and in the glass I saw a reflection of myself.

“What kind of monster was it that peered eagerly forward to look into my face? Could it be the hideous and faithful likeness of one who was ‘neither beast nor human;’ or a juggle created by some fiend to madden me? I dashed my fist into the mirror, and cut my fingers to the bone. I did not feel the pain of my wounded flesh. My soul was quivering with the keener torture of the indignity which Nature had fastened upon me. Why was I sent into the world in this shape, a horror to all that beheld me? If I could destroy myself as I had destroyed the reflection of myself, would it not be a good thing done? The idea held me for an instant only. No. Why should I take my life? Better to think myself other than I was, transformed to beauty, in the likeness of the handsome gentleman whose portrait I was again examining. Without any absolute direction of my will I aped the graceful posture of this fine gentleman, aped the motion of his dainty hands, aped his smile and the pose of his head. In

this disguise I gazed at the portrait of the lovely girl, and kissed my hand to her ; and the next moment, with some sudden notion of the truth, I burst into a passion of tears, and staggered from the room. Down the stairs I stumbled with but one thought stirring in my mind—despisal of myself. I found myself now in a room which, but for the dust that lay heavily about it, I might have supposed had been quite recently occupied. Bottles and glasses were there ; in the glasses were the crusted dregs of wine, and thick stains of spilt liquor were on the table ; two chairs lay overturned on the ground, and by their side a rusty rapier. I was in a paroxysm of rage at my deformity. On a sideboard were some bottles which had not been uncorked. I knocked the necks off two, and pouring the contents into a huge silver goblet with double handles, I drank the wine with greedy enjoyment. It exhilarated me, and changed my mood to one of passionate hope and exultation. I shouted, I sang, I danced, and drank more wine, until I fell to the ground and slept like a log.

“ I did not awake till early morning, and

I opened my eyes to the singing of birds. The sounds came from my own lips, inspired perhaps by a woodland dream. I rose to my feet, and thought of all that had passed ; the wine had not affected me otherwise than to make me sleep ; my head was perfectly clear.

“ I made a further examination of the deserted house, and walked through the rooms, from the top of the house to the bottom. The doors that were locked I opened with ease, even the cellar-doors, which led to vaults where rare old wine lay buried, ripening to rarer perfection.

“ There remained but one room still unexplored ; it was locked, and had not yielded easily to my pressure. I returned to it, and using all my strength, forced it open. It was full of books. The walls were lined with them ; protected by glass cases from dust, they reached from floor to ceiling. The windows were emblazoned with richly-coloured pictures ; beautiful groups in bronze were set about ; the ceiling was carved into quaint faces, whose eyes looked down upon me with solemn import, whose features were instinct with life. Figures

of armed men stood in niches, mute guardians of the rich treasures of the room. I approached them in fear; I touched them, and they did not strike me down; the armour encased no forms of living flesh. These figures, the models in bronze, the carvings, the subdued light, the eloquent books, impressed me deeply. In a corner stood a large case of wood, the outer surface of which was inlaid with figures of birds and beasts and objects unfamiliar to me. I raised the lid, and saw a long row of ivory tablets. I pressed my fingers upon them, and a deep voice issued forth, which floated through the walls, and died gradually away in the distance. When the sound fell upon my ears I started back, fearing that I had released a spirit; but presently, the sound being gone, I touched other keys, and produced notes of sadness, of joy, of solemnity. Now came a peal of wedding bells, now the tolling of a funeral dirge. It was the first time I had heard music different from the natural music of field and forest.

“I was in another world; I heard voices; I saw visions; a new spirit was

born within me. I was no longer Rans the deformed! I was a human being, with a soul to be moved by passion.

“Leontine, I believe you have a soul. In another state of being we shall wander side by side in friendly communion, thinking of our life in the Silver Isle. You will be faithful and true, I know; we shall understand things better then.

“Perhaps then, Evangeline, still living, will be reading these lines, and will send a tender thought into the air for the cripple who would yield up his life for her. You see, my dog, there is nothing else that binds me to this world—not even you. I was growing into the spiritual likeness of a savage, my case a fitting one for a world of evil thought, and she brought back to me my better self. I was ready so to hate myself and all mankind that no deed would have been too black for my mind to conceive and my hands to perform. It is no slight service, Leontine, to have your sense of self-respect restored to you, to be made to feel, through the love of a little child, that, twisted out of all proportion as you are—through no fault of your own—your nature is in kinship with much that is

beautiful and bright in earth and air. The clouds, the flowers, the balmy air, the sweet sounds of forest life, and I, are of one family. The clouds shine upon me, the flowers incline towards me, the balmy air kisses me, the harmony of nature is not less sweet when I am by. It is only man that is unkind. And I, knowing the world, know that to bend and fawn and lick the hand that wrongs you, destroys within you the spirit of manhood, and brings you to the moral level of the snake, that crawls upon its belly and lives in slime. So I give scorn for scorn, and make the best of what I was not able to avoid.

“I took possession of the deserted mansion, and no soul disturbed me for years. During all that time not a human being but myself entered the house. I haunted it in secret, and my mother was not able to discover where I spent the days. She followed me, and I tricked her; led her over marsh and water-field, and through the prickly intricacies of the bush; I ran, and walked, and lingered, with her behind me, and never turned to see; then I led her a dance back to our wretched hut,

laughing to myself at the knowledge that I had a palace of my own, whose treasures of art had opened the windows of my soul, and let in Heaven's light.

“‘Where do you hide?’ asked my mother.

“‘In a cave,’ I answered.

“‘Alone?’

“‘No.’

“‘With whom, then?’ she cried suspiciously.

“‘With shadows,’ I said, laughing in her face, ‘that have life, but cannot speak.’

“She asked me whether I was a fool, a knave, or a madman. I asked her in return whether she was really my mother. She aimed a blow at me, that struck the air.

“‘You can tell me one thing,’ I said composedly; ‘who owns us?’

“‘A great lord.’

“‘A man, do you mean?’

“‘No; a gentleman.’

“‘A gentleman, and not a man; then he is in bad case. And all this land is his?’

“‘Aye, for miles around.’

“‘Why does he not come here?’

“‘You had better ask him when you see him.’

“ ‘I will. When will he come?’

“ ‘When the whim seizes him; then you will be whipped.’

“ ‘I think not. I would fling the man into the air who dared to touch me with hand or weapon.’

“ ‘It was her turn to laugh now.

“ ‘You are a slave,’ she said, ‘as I am. You do not know what great men can do.’

“ ‘I will wait and learn,’ I said calmly.

“ ‘She regarded me with curiosity.

“ ‘You are changed, Ranf.’

“ ‘I glanced over my shoulder at my hump. ‘It has grown larger,’ I said; ‘it is big enough for a man.’

“ ‘Your are one in years.’

“ ‘I was glad to hear that.

“ ‘So,’ I said commandingly, ‘mother or no mother, treat me as a man.’

“ ‘I compelled respect from her. It was a poor triumph, Leontine, and it shames me now to think I felt proud of it. . . .

“ ‘I am interrupted. There is a tapping at my door, as of some gentle creature desiring shelter. Leontine’s head is inclined towards the door, and her soft eyes are fixed upon mine. Go, my dog, and

discover who it is that seeks admittance in manner so gracious. . . .

“It is one of my white doves from the lower hut. What brings you here, my bird? Have you a message from spirit-land tied under your wing? Am I summoned? No, my dove, not yet. I shall live my time, I believe. But it is kind of you to come to see your wounded master, though I must have taught you badly that you should come without being bidden. This time I forgive you. Fly to your dovecote and find your mate.

CHAPTER II.

RANF AND MAUVAIN.

“FROM the date of this conversation with my mother my steps were no longer dogged. I was left to do as I pleased with my days, most of which I spent in the deserted house, feasting on old wine and old books. I spared neither, and did not abuse them. The wine created for me an ideal world, in which I performed vainglorious deeds; the books bore better fruit. There were in the library many manuscripts relating to botanical science, and these were especially attractive to me. I became (I have no doubt superficially) learned in the growth and life and affinities of plants, and my studies—which were of infinite value to me in what I choose to call soul-development—led me to the discovery of a dream-flower, from which I distilled a liquid the mere inhalation of which is

sufficient to produce sleep, and, often, beautiful and remarkable dreams. The dream-flower is growing now upon this mountain of snow.

“So passed my early life, Evangeline; for it is to you I am speaking. Your spirit, dear one, seems to be hovering over me in this hut; you are but a child now; when you are a woman, love me not less. You will live to hear words of deep devotion from men’s lips, but there is no being who would endure more for your sake than Ranf the deformed.

“My mother said to me,—

“‘Ranf, the old lord is dead.’

“‘Well?’ I answered.

“‘A new man reigns—his son. We shall have fine times again.’

“‘Is he better than the lord who is dead?’

“‘Fresher, younger, with blood not yet ripened. The old lord let things run to waste. He has palaces in which he has not set foot for years. Think of that.’

“‘I am thinking of it. What will be done with those palaces now?’

“They will be inhabited again; the old lord in his youth led a riotous life; the

young one will do the same. There will be hunting and feasting and love-making. Ah, Ranf, I, too, was young once.'

" 'Naturally. Is this new lord rich? '

" 'He could not count his money.'

" 'Ah! Others will do it for him.'

" 'Ranf,' said my mother, 'you talk as if you knew the world.'

" 'One does not need to mix with it to know it.'

" 'She came close to me. 'You are mistaken; you know nothing; you will be wiser in time.'

" 'I hope so. Wisdom shall have a welcome.'

" 'It is as bitter as gall; you will wish you were a hind.'

" 'Why? '

" 'She touched my hump, and pointed to my crooked limbs. 'You are a spoilt man,' she said.

" 'Well,' I said, pretending to care nothing for her croaking, 'if I am spoilt for this world, I am not for the next.'

" 'There is no next,' she muttered gloomily; 'this is the end of everything.'

" 'The thought disturbed me: 'How will it be with you, Ranf, when the new lord

comes this way? Will he leave you your palace, or fill it with his lacqueys?’

“I consoled myself with the reflection that I had made good use of time and opportunity.

“I felt the necessity of being more cautious than hitherto in my visits to the deserted mansion. A curious temptation assailed me. ‘If,’ thought I, ‘I were to meet this lord, and send him into a sleep from which he would not awake, I should be safe, and we both should be happy. I could do so with my dream-flower.’

“Since the news of the succession of the new lord, the woman whom I must continue to call my mother had shown a hideous desire to decorate herself with gewgaws and fine clothes, of which, to my surprise, she had a supply. I had no idea that she possessed hidden treasure.

“‘Why do you make yourself so gay?’ I asked.

“‘To please the young lord,’ she answered.

“‘Do you think he will fall in love with you?’

“She leered at me. I had never any respect for her; my feeling now was one of abhorrence.

“One night, as I was about to leave the deserted house, the thought intruded itself that it might be the last time I should ever be able to command its treasures. I walked through every room, and bade farewell to familiar objects; they were nearer to me, and more endeared than any human creature.

“The next morning, when I stole cautiously to the spot, I observed signs of life about the house; persons whose faces I could not distinguish were moving through the rooms. My reign was over.

“I retreated immediately, and, so as not to give my mother a clue, I passed the day in a remote part of the forest.

“Upon my return to our hut my mother said she had news for me; the new lord would soon present himself; his agents and servants were preparing the estate for his examination; she had seen them, and had spoken to them.

“‘They are taking account of everything, Ranf. There is a steward, with a sharp face, who looks as if he would like to count the trees and birds.’

“‘Did he take account of you?’

“‘Yes, and set down my name and yours.’

“ ‘Why mine?’

“ ‘You belong to the new lord, as I do. Were you not born on his land? Have you not thriven on it?’

“ ‘And upon his books and wine,’ I added mentally; and said aloud: ‘I am no slave.’

“ ‘You are a fool if you rebel against a powerful master. The Mauvains are not to be defied by such as you.’

“ ‘We shall see.’

“ ‘I had no thought of defiance. It was only that I would not tamely submit to slavery.

“ ‘Where are the men now?’ I asked.

“ ‘They have gone in the direction of a beautiful house which the old lord built when he was young. It has not been inhabited for years. Come, I will show it to you.’

“ ‘It was a dark night, and I followed her to my old haunt. It was ablaze with light. Sounds of loud laughter and singing floated through the air.

“ ‘They are enjoying themselves, Ranf.’

“ ‘Yes; the new reign has commenced well.’

“ ‘The cellars are filled with rich wine.’

“ ‘Why did you not tell me before? We would have feasted on it.’

“ ‘I dared not speak of the place, Ranf; I dared not go near it. I lived there when I was a girl.’

“ ‘And what made you afraid of it?’

“ ‘Strange things were done there. The old lord was wild and reckless, headstrong, bloody.’

“ ‘Headstrong and bloody enough for murder?’

“ ‘Speak low. A young lady was brought there against her will. The old lord had taken a fancy to her, and he stole her from her friends. She went mad, and one morning was found dead in the grounds.’

“ ‘Did she die a natural death?’

“ ‘No one knew.’

“ ‘You are mistaken, mother. Even I know, who never heard the tale before. The Mauvains must be a brave race of men to kill young girls!’

“ ‘You are right, Ranf; they are as brave as lions, and as fearless.’

“ ‘We had approached close to the house, and were seen. Half a dozen drunken roysterers rushed towards my mother and

seized her. She cried for help, and in a moment I was engaged in a desperate struggle. Truly I found my strength prodigious, and my veins thrilled with exultation as I flung the men from me and stamped upon them. Their shouts brought others out, and they came with torches, and some stood about and laughed at the fight. I have the scene before me now; a patch of light, with torches waving; deep darkness beyond; and I and twenty men struggling like demons. My mother had escaped in the confusion, and I, taking advantage of opportunity, found a favourable moment to leap into the darkness.

“‘It is an imp of hell,’ I heard the men cry as I escaped.

“‘I overtook my mother; she was in an agony of fear.

“‘‘There is an end of us,’ she whimpered; ‘I wish you had died at your birth.’

“‘It might have been as well,’ I said. ‘If you did not want help you should not have called for it.’

“‘They will come to-morrow and whip you.’

“‘It will cost them something. I owe them gratitude; but for them I might not have known how glorious it is to be strong.

“My mother spoke truth. In the morning the men came to our hut, and, being now sober, conquered me more easily than I had expected. There were plenty of them, and I gave them marks to show for their pains; but my resistance was useless; I was bound with ropes, set astride a horse, and led towards the house of which I had been master for so many years. My enemies were free of their words, and mocked my deformity, and taunted me in brutal fashion for my ugliness and crookedness. They had a monkey with them, and they strapped it on to my hump, and jeered at and flouted the pair of us, saying we were brothers, and that one mother bore us. When I shut my eyes in the endeavour to forget them, they spat in my face.

“I could not learn what they intended to do with me. They threatened so many things; to burn me, to drown me, to hang me, to whip me to death. Could I have invoked annihilation at any moment during that humiliating ride, I should not have hesitated.

“We arrived at the house ; I was lifted from the horse, and, with the monkey still fastened to my shoulders, was set on a height. My tormentors formed themselves into a mock court of justice ; I was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be thrown upon a stack of damp straw, which was to be fired at every point ; if I escaped suffocation by smoke I was to be tried again. Now, while the straw was being collected and piled up in an open space at some distance from the house, an unexpected incident in the drama occurred. A company of gentlemen on horseback suddenly made their appearance. They were handsomely dressed, and in gay spirits. They reined up in front of me.

“I was seized with a desire to mock my fate and make light of it, not doubting that their mood would fall in with that of my persecutors.

“‘My lords and gentlemen,’ I cried, endeavouring to incline my head towards them, ‘you have arrived in time for the show ; a man is about to be burnt. It is a sight worth paying for, and you shall witness it for nothing.’

“They inquired my meaning.

“ ‘Ask your equals,’ I said, pointing to the men who were approaching me for the purpose of executing their threat.

“The gentlemen—one in particular—frowned, and I saw that my judges were disconcerted by their appearance.

“ ‘Explain this,’ demanded the chief of the party.

“My judges told their story in their own lying fashion, and said they merely intended to frighten me in a harmless way for the injury I had inflicted upon some of their comrades. The manner of these men was so slavish and obsequious, and the lies they told so outrageous, that I laughed aloud in scorn of them.

“ ‘What have you to say?’ asked the gentleman.

“ ‘First,’ I replied, ‘that if I am to be punished for fighting single-handed against twenty, there is no reason that another should suffer. If you do not care to do justice to a man, do justice to a monkey.’

“The gentlemen appeared to like my humour; the monkey was unstrapped from my shoulders, and I was then ordered to tell my story. I told it, and offered to prove it upon the bodies of two of the

most powerful of my enemies. There was something in me that attracted them, some dare-devilry or defiance of fate, or perhaps something in my speech different from what they might have expected from a being of my stamp. My proposal was hailed with a shout of laughter.

“ ‘It shall be so, Knight of the Hump,’ said the chief: ‘I am master here.’ ”

“ ‘You are Mauvain, then,’ I said audaciously, ‘the new lord?’ ”

“ ‘I am,’ he replied, seemingly amused at my boldness.

“ ‘My mother has told me of you. “We shall have fine times,” she said, “now the old lord is dead.” They have commenced well for me.’ ”

“ ‘Is your mother here?’ he inquired.

“ ‘No,’ I said; ‘ashamed of bringing me into the world, she is praying for my soul while I go out of it.’ ”

“ ‘You have a nimble tongue, hunch-back.’ ”

“ ‘There is no hump on it, my lord. If I am to fight I must be unbound.’ ”

“By his order the ropes were taken from my body, and I gave a leap in the air. A fantastic spirit animated me, and

my wits were sharpened by the opportunity given me for quip and repartee. A ring was formed, within which the tournament was to be held. Whichever one of the three combatants stepped outside this ring was to be driven in with whip and thong.

“The gentlemen entered into the affair with keen enjoyment; it was rare sport for them.

“My antagonists entered the ring, stripped to the waist. They were fine stalwart men, and their muscles stood out like whipcord. I measured them with my eye; they looked on me with scorn. I thought to myself that it would have been chivalrous on the part of the gentlemen to have suggested that the battle about to be fought was unequal, but no such idea occurred to them.

“‘If I kill these men,’ I said to Mauvain, ‘what will happen to me?’

“‘I will hold you free,’ he replied; ‘if you come off victorious, you shall enter my service, and be dressed in silk.’

“‘Ah,’ I said with a grimace, ‘the tailor will have a difficult job.’

“Whereat the gentlemen laughed again.

“Now, whether they wished me to be

victorious or not I cannot say ; I know that they betted on the result of the battle, as they would have done if beasts were about to fight instead of men.

“ ‘What is your name, hunchback ?’ asked Mauvain.

“ ‘Ranf,’ I answered.

“ ‘I shall stake money on you.’

“ ‘You are a good judge. If I lose, you can cut off my hump. If I win, I cry halves.’

“The signal was given for the battle to commence. There were no set rules ; we were to fight in any way we pleased. For a moment or two we gazed at each other in silence ; then the two men advanced towards me, one undertaking to seize me, while the other looked on and bided his time. I gave him no time to bide. Slipping past the active one, I seized the other, and flung him like lightning over my shoulder. He fell upon his head, and lay motionless. Before my remaining enemy could take advantage of me, I confronted him. I saw him turn pale, and I played with him ; I allowed him to grip me, but he could have made as much impression upon steel as he made upon me.

Never till that moment was I aware of my full strength. Gradually I slid my hands from his shoulders to his wrists, until I held his arms in my left hand as in a vice, while my right was free to kill him, if I cared to do so.

“‘What do you think?’ I said, as I looked him straight in the face.

“‘That you are leagued with the devil,’ he muttered, writhing in mortification and shame at his disgrace.

“‘It was you who spat in my face,’ I said; ‘the devil I am in league with is a foolish devil. Go; I give you your life.’

“I hurled him from me, and he fell, stunned, to the ground. Then I stepped to Mauvain, and said,—

“‘I am ready for another two.’

“‘You have done enough,’ said Mauvain, flinging me some money.

“It was the first money I had ever owned. I looked around upon the men who had insulted me, and gathering the money, I threw it among them, as carelessly as it had been thrown to me.

“‘I will buy the hunchback of you,’ said one of the gentlemen to Mauvain.

“‘He is not for sale,’ replied Mauvain.

“ So, I was a commodity, to be bought and sold. My flesh and blood did not belong to me.

“ Within a month my mother and I were established in Mauvain’s household, and had soft beds to sleep in. My mother was in her glory ; I sighed for my old life. If I had met with one proof of human sympathy or kindness, it might have been different with me ; but I was surrounded by hatred. I was feared for my strength, and men were careful not to provoke me, but none would associate with me. They would not admit me into their pastimes ; when I spoke they answered in monosyllables, or turned from me in contemptuous silence ; they would not eat or drink with me ; they would not touch my hand in token of friendship. It was with women as with men, and that hurt me more sorely ; fresh young beauty that I innocently admired, as I would a flower or any other fair evidence of nature, shrank from me as from a pestilence. Not one kind word, not one gracious look, fell upon my heart to blossom into gratitude or affection.

“ It was monstrous. What crime had I

committed that I should be thus abhorred ?
The crime of having been born ?

“ The deepest affliction of all was that I myself, in the exercise of my own instincts, found justification for the contempt and hatred of men. Else, why should I, as I did, turn sympathetically to objects of beauty in animate or inanimate nature ; why should I, as I did, love to gaze upon what was fairest and brightest in creation ? Had I been well-shaped and straight-limbed, would it have been with me as with others, and should I have regarded physical misfortune with aversion ? I think not, if it had appealed to me, as I, in my first communionship with mankind, appealed to those with whom I was thrown into association.

“ Mauvain took me with him into the busier world, where I learned to know mankind better than in his beautiful country home. It did not improve upon more intimate acquaintanceship. I thought it an honour when Mauvain lent me to his artist friends as a model for stone or canvas, but when I saw myself depicted as a foil to beauty, and recognized that the moral lesson sought to be conveyed made

me spiritually as well as bodily hideous, I felt as if I should have loved to cut the canvas to shreds and shatter the marble to fragments for the injustice perpetrated upon me. All this embittered me, and made my way of life harder and harder as the time went on.

“Fond of his pleasures, and unscrupulous in the pursuit of them, Mauvain was also an ambitious man, and his ambition, leading him to political intrigue, brought him to a crisis in which his life was in danger. He was compelled to fly the country.

“Of all his numerous friends, of all who served him, he chose me to assist him in his escape. It needed caution and courage, for enemies were searching for him, and there was a price upon his head. I knew that I could earn this money, I knew that his life was in my hands, I knew that he had no feeling of regard for me, and that he had only used me for his sport and pastime; but I did not betray him. The service he required of me I performed faithfully, and he received it with unthankful indifference.

“It was early morning, and we stood

upon the sea-shore. The vessel which was to convey him to a land of safety lay a mile off, its sails ready for the flight. A boat awaited him. He was about to step into it, without a word, when he turned to me with a sudden impulse, and said,—

“ ‘What will you do when I am gone?’ ”

“ ‘Be my own master,’ I replied; ‘I have had one; I am glad to be rid of him.’ ”

“ He laughed gaily; he was a man of courage, and though every additional moment might be fatal, he lingered, because it was his whim to linger. ”

“ ‘You are a bit of a student, Ranf,’ he said; ‘Heaven knows how you acquired your knowledge, but you have some, and I think you understand human nature. I am curious to know why you have served me faithfully in this last perilous mission. You might have earned money by giving me up. You have no love for me, I know; you know I have nothing but contempt for you; you might have had my life. Why have you served me now, at the risk of your own?’ ”

“ ‘Question for question,’ I said; ‘answer mine first. Why of all the men by whom

you were surrounded did you entrust your life to my keeping?’

“‘Because,’ he replied, with a frank smile, ‘of all the men by whom I was surrounded you were the one who, giving evidence against me, would be least likely to be believed. No one trusts you, Ranf. Had you said to my enemies, “Search to the left,” they would have searched to the right. Had you told them the truth, they would have instantly concluded you were putting them off the scent. That is the reason I employed you.’

“‘You had not even respect for me?’

“‘Not the slightest, hunchback.’

“His contemptuous tone did not sting me; I was used to it.

“‘We are not,’ I said, ‘equals even at this moment, when your life hangs upon a thread!’

“‘Equals!’ he exclaimed. ‘To prove to you how far we are removed, I have a mind to stop and show you how a gentleman can die.’

“‘Do not trouble yourself,’ I said, with some sort of admiration for him; ‘death comes from one cause in man and gentleman; it is really whether one can or cannot

breathe. So we are very far removed !
Intellectually ? ’

“ ‘ As far as the poles.’

“ ‘ It is a comforting belief. Now I will answer your question.’

“ ‘ Aye, do ; I had almost forgotten it.’

“ ‘ You want to know why I have saved your life at the risk of my own. It was the least I could do in return for the amusement you have afforded me. Then, you have protected me ; I could do no less by you. Again, you have never stepped between me and my whims. Not in one of your pleasures have I taken an interest. Not for one of the women you have followed have I felt a spark of admiration. I have laughed at you often ; you thought they were your slaves. You were mistaken ; you were theirs. My mind is not as crooked as my body, and it might have been that some woman, or some child, who touched your inner life might also have touched mine. If that had been the case, and you had wronged, or to my knowledge harboured a thought of wrong towards the being I had an affection for—’

“ I paused. With a patronizing, dis-

dainful smile upon his handsome face
Mauvain said,—

“‘Proceed. I do not know when I
have been so interested.’

“I cast my eyes to the ground, and
searched for the largest pebbles on the
shore. I deliberately selected two, and,
holding them in one hand, crushed them
into fragments.

“‘Symbolical,’ said Mauvain, ‘and ex-
pressive.’

“‘But,’ said I, ‘these stones have no
soul; you have, and it should not have
escaped me.’

CHAPTER III.

RANF'S EXPERIENCES IN THE WORLD.

“MAUVAIN being gone, I was my own master; I could wander where I pleased, and could choose my own mode of life. My foretaste of the world's ways and of the ways of men had not been pleasant, but I was a free man now, and might meet with a better kind of justice.

“Wondering a little what had become of my mother, whom I had not seen for many months, I made my way back to the forest in which my early life had been passed. I went first to the hut; it was deserted. I sought her then, and found her, in Mauvain's fine house. She was alone; no person but herself was within hail. She asked me for news of Mauvain, and I told her of his peril and escape.

“‘It was noble of him to trust you,’ she said.

“‘He trusted me because he despised me ; he told me as much.’

“‘He has a right to despise us ; we are of a different make from such as he.’

“‘We are flesh and blood ; kings are no more than that.’

“I inquired for the servants, and my mother related to me how, when they heard that a price was set upon Mauvain’s head, they had fled like rats, loaded with treasure. Leontine, of all the men and women in Mauvain’s service, there was not one who was not a thief. He had been liberal to them, and they had fattened on his generosity ; in his prosperity they had fawned upon him, in his downfall they despoiled him. Such is the value of the service which waits upon the rich and powerful.

“The grounds and gardens around the house, and every room in it, bore token to the work of spoliation. Trees had been hacked, flower-beds trodden down ; the furniture had been tossed about, and much of it broken ; glasses were shattered, and wine had been spilt on all the floors. So wanton had been the work of destruction that hatred must have sprung from the

remembrance of favours received. Every step I took showed me a new evidence of man's ingratitude.

"‘Ranf,’ said I, communing with myself, ‘sigh not for riches, or power, or fame. The poor are the best off, and obscurity is a blessing.’

"The library, in which I had spent my happiest days, had not been spared; statues were shattered, pictures defaced, and books torn from their bindings. This wasteful wickedness affected me as much as if my own body had been made to suffer.

"‘Did you help these crawlers,’ I said to my mother, ‘or look on in silence?’

"‘I tried to prevent the destruction,’ she replied, ‘and they beat me and threatened to burn me. I was lucky to escape.’

"I asked her what she intended to do now. She said she should live in the house unless she were forcibly removed, and should take care of it till Mauvain returned.

"‘You think he will return?’

"‘Oh, yes. What has happened once will happen again. And you, Ranf, you will stop with me?’

“‘I do not know. What could I do here?’

“‘Stop and play the lord,’ she said coaxingly, ‘and let me attend on you. I will be your servant.’

“‘A fine idea. We will commence at once; to-night I will sleep in the bed of a lord.’

“She hobbled away to make Mauvain’s room ready for me; the fancy tickled her, for I heard her chuckling to herself.

“She waited upon me that night, as though I were a prince. I gave myself the airs of one, and she declared that I aped a great man’s manners to perfection.

“‘It is only my hump that blocks the way,’ I said, ‘and a few other trifling imperfections, such as crooked limbs and odd features. If you were a grand lady, how would you behave?’

“‘I would stamp upon those beneath me!’ she cried venomously. ‘They should be whipped and starved!’

“‘You have a wholesome mind. How happy I ought to be that you are my mother!’

“She followed me to Mauvain’s bedroom with lighted candles, and said,

‘Good night, my lord son.’ She would have embraced me, but I put her from me; I had no feeling of affection for her. Had I known, Leontine, how it would have been with her when I looked upon her face again, I should have pressed her hand and have bidden her a solemn farewell.

“As I undressed myself for bed I felt in my pocket a small phial containing a liquid I had distilled from the dream-flower.

“‘Could a man command his dreams,’ I thought, ‘half his life might be passed in heaven, however wretched his lot. The soldier would dream of conquests, the poet of fame, and fools of love.’

“I inhaled from the phial, murmuring again, ‘And fools of love!’ and fell into a deep sleep. I was haunted by a dream of a veiled face, the face of a woman, which accompanied me in a myriad fantastic and extravagant adventures, wooing me to it, drawing me after it by a spell to which I gladly yielded, over fields of flowers, through forests of eternal night, through clouds, and caverns, and shining water, and in the wild tangle of these fancies keeping evil from me and turning me from evil.

Not once did this face present itself clearly to my imagination; but it was fair and beautiful, I knew; and ever and again in my dreams came a murmur like music, now sweet and tender, now passionate and wild, ‘and fools of love!’

“I awoke in the middle of the night; the bright stars were out, and a soft, mysterious light bathed field and forest. I arose and dressed myself, and quietly stole from the house. ‘I will not live a life of mockery,’ I thought. ‘I will see more of men; I will go into the world.’

“Leontine, I was juggling with myself. Even you know that I was moved by other promptings, that in the depths of my soul burned a painful yearning for a being to love, to tend, to care for, to live for, to die for. I envied the very birds in their nests. No living creature’s life is complete that lives without a mate.

“Perhaps in some corner of the world a fair face was waiting for me, such as had followed me in my dreams, whose eyes, touched by an angel’s hand, would see that I was a man to be pitied, and not unworthy to be loved. I must have been

mad to hope it ; but we are not masters of the springs which control the inner life.

“Before me stretched the meadows, enamelled with flowers ; within each little cup lay Nature’s kiss, the diamond drop of life ; beyond the meadows loomed the profound depths of the forest. My road was in that direction, and I plunged into the leafy wood, and drank from a favourite stream, and lingered a little, believing I should never see these familiar friends again.

“‘Farewell,’ I said, as I gazed around with a feeling of pleasant melancholy, ‘never more shall the echo of my voice be heard within this forest.’

“So I went forth into the world to distant countries where I was not known, meeting—as I might have guessed had I not been a credulous fool—with no better fate than had hitherto attended me. In whatever place I showed my form I was jeered and laughed at ; my hump was an inspiration to mockery ; children ran after me, laughing and shouting, and when I turned upon them, more frequently in pity than in anger, they fled in affright. If I presented myself at a village fête, mirth

was checked, the music ceased, and the dancers gave me ample elbow-room. I could not win the favour of man, woman, or child; it was impressed upon me in every possible way that I was an embodiment of evil. 'The wine tastes like vinegar,' I have heard said as I was standing near. Never did I commit a wrong; but I was often dragged before authority on suspicion. In those straits my wits did me good service, for it was not possible to trace any direct evil to my door. But I was always directed to leave the place quickly. I may truly say that the setting of every sun added to the bitterness of knowledge. Sometimes at the end of a weary day I would enter an inn, choosing always the commonest and humblest; and although I never asked for charity, it was invariably indicated to me that my presence was an intrusion. I had then to insist upon my rights; but the unwelcomed guest is not to be envied. I was not always amiably inclined, and, when the mood served, I took a savage and just delight in paying men in their own coin, snarl for snarl, and blow for blow.

I had some curious lessons, the most irreconcilable being those in which crime looked with contempt upon misfortune. I was benighted, and there was no chance of my sleeping under a roof. Another man in the wood was in the same plight. He had gathered branches, and had kindled a fire, by the side of which he was sitting when I came up to him in the dark night. I asked permission to warm myself by his fire. He lifted a blazing branch and examined me. By the light of the branch we were enabled to see each other clearly. He had an evil face, ripe for the gallows. With foul words, reviling my deformity and ugliness, he bade me begone, crying out, in a tone of brutal scorn, how dared I presume to thrust myself upon his company, and that he thanked—well, he said God (meaning it as much as most men who use the term) that he was in the habit of associating with better men than I! It made me wonder to hear the man, who seemed fit only to associate with gaol-birds, speak to me with so much arrogant assumption. I could with ease have driven him from the spot, and taken possession of the fire, but

it was his, and I did not care to commit an injustice.

“Three months afterwards I saw this man executed for murder. And yet he deemed me unfit company.

“Now and then it happened that an artist, struck by my figure, would stop and invite me to his studio. I allowed myself to be used in that way—having served my apprenticeship in Mauvain’s service—for it became my principal means of gaining a livelihood. I found myself sometimes side by side with beauty—I, with my hairy skin exposed, in contact with beauty’s fair presentment. A rare contrast, and beauty would regard me with inward aversion, being compelled, when we posed for nymph and satyr, to look into my ugly face with eyes of love. Not seldom I shared my gains with these fair moulds, for beauty was easy to pick up, and its price was low. The world is full of flowers. I was not so common a creature, and I exacted high terms. A day in a studio has often provided me with food for a month.

“On a well-remembered night, I was sitting by myself in the public room of a

house of entertainment. A man entered and beckoned me out.

“ ‘ You came into the town this evening,’ he said.

“ ‘ I did,’ I replied.

“ ‘ By the eastern road.’

“ ‘ You are right.’

“ ‘ You are the man. I cannot be mistaken.’

“ ‘ Not easily. There is only one of me.’

“ He looked at me with a peculiar smile. ‘ My master wishes to see you.’

“ ‘ Who is your master?’

“ ‘ A rich man.’

“ ‘ Does he know me?’

“ ‘ He caught a glimpse of you this evening as he rode past in his carriage.’

“ ‘ I have some of its mud upon me. Enamoured of what he saw, he wishes to examine me more closely. Is he an artist?’

“ ‘ No. But he will pay you well if you come.’

“ ‘ Well, I am for sale. Give me an earnest.’

“ He offered me a piece of gold.

“ ‘ I want two pieces,’ I said.

“He gave them to me, and I followed him to a mansion in the wealthiest part of the town. Music was playing, lights were glittering. Carriages drew up to the gates of entrance, and ladies and gentlemen, fantastically dressed, alighted and entered the house. A crowd of townspeople stood about the gates to see the gay company, and greeted this person with laughter, and that with a buzz of admiration. I drew back.

“‘Your master wants to make a show of me.’

“‘He thought you would suppose so, and he directed me to say that you are wrong. He wishes, for his own satisfaction, to see you alone. I am to take you to his private study, and we are to enter by this side-door.’

“The study was as sumptuously furnished as any room in Mauvain’s house. It was evident that its proprietor was a man of wealth and taste. As I was examining its art treasures, I heard a voice behind me.

“‘Don’t turn, hunchback. I am the master here, and I have a fancy to speak to you for a moment or two without a

face-to-face meeting. If you are not afraid of me, humour me.'

" 'I am afraid of no man. It pays to humour the rich; I will humour you.'

" 'You speak well. This hump of yours must be packed with wisdom.'

" 'You are mistaken; it is packed with sorrow.'

" 'You have scored again. You seem interested in my works of art. Do you understand them?'

" 'Listen. I will act the critic.'

" 'With vanity, in display of which I felt a curious contempt of myself, I criticized the objects in the room, after the fashion of a connoisseur, my unseen host interposing from time to time with 'Well judged!' 'Excellent!' 'Well done, ragged philosopher!'

" 'Have you had enough?' I asked.

" 'Yes, you are at liberty now.'

" I turned, and started back in amazement. Before me stood a frightful likeness of myself, truly a frightful double, for Nature had treated the owner of the treasures I had criticized even more scurvily than she had treated me. My ugliness was beauty, my shape graceful,

my limbs symmetrical, in comparison with his.

“He in his turn examined me narrowly, and a frown gathered on his face.

“‘You said to my servant,’ said the monster, ‘that there was only one of you. What do you say now?’

“‘That you give me consolation. Nature, I thank you. I pay for my pleasures. Here.’

“I held out to him the two pieces of gold I had received from his servant. He took them with a grimace, and pocketed them with a bow, saying,—

“‘It is the first money I have ever earned. What do you think of me? Sum me up in a word.’

“‘Hideous.’

“‘Worse than you?’

“‘Worse than three of me. I shall sleep well to-night.’

“‘Insolent cripple!’ he cried, laughing like a hyena. ‘How dare you speak thus to the great? I can see hunger in your eyes; your clothes are so full of holes that you are compelled to make a purse of your fist! It would have been better for you had you been worse than you

are. You would be glad to change places with me.'

" 'Not for the largest jewel you could offer me.'

" 'You lie! How much money have you?'

" 'As much as will cheat starvation for three times twenty-four hours;' and I spat a small piece of silver on his fine carpet.

" 'Ah, that's your purse, is it? Beggar, look here.'

" He thrust his hands into his pockets, and drew them out, filled with money, which he let fall upon my silver piece, in a golden shower. He opened the drawers of cabinets, and drew forth more gold, which he rained upon the carpet.

" 'It is all mine,' he said; 'I have more than I can spend. You'll change your mind.'

" 'Not I. What can your gold do for you?'

" 'I will show you presently, if you have a mind to see.'

" 'I am ready enough; but I thought I had seen all that the world can show. Of one thing I am certain; your gold

cannot buy you one look or word of affection.'

" 'Wiseacre! There are no tongues more eloquent, no eyes more loving, than those which gold commands. You shall judge for yourself. I invite you to become my guest to-night.'

" 'I shall do you honour,' I said, holding out my rags.

" 'You are fittingly attired. A fancy ball is held in my house. You will see rich men in sackcloth and beggars in velvet. The sight will repay you.'

" 'I consent. Give me a cup of wine first; I am faint.'

" He brought forward two long slender glasses of the thinnest glass, and filled them with rich wine. We touched brims.

" 'To you, my handsome brother,' he said.

" I never saw a more brilliant company than was assembled within those walls, nor a more lavish display of wealth, nor women more graceful and fair. I was at my ease, for there were men among the guests disguised as monkeys, and some as devils, and some as goats. Some looked at me, and asked each other,—

“ ‘What is that? How well it is done! One would think it was real!’

“ And others replied with a laugh,—

“ ‘Almost as real as our host.’

“ All through the night people gathered round this strange host, and flattered him and sought his favour. The youngest and most beautiful women hung upon his arm, and cast languishing glances at him, and inclined their lovely heads to his deformed shoulders; and as he passed me, toying with their velvety fingers, he looked up at me—he was even shorter than I—and cried,—

“ ‘How is this, brother?’

“ These words addressed to me by one so rich and powerful, gave me distinction, and I found myself courted by those fair women to whom my host had no time to pay attention. Yes, in my rags—which they believed to be a disguise—and with my rough speech and manners—which they believed to be assumed—I was an object of attraction to those creatures, who were ready to sacrifice themselves on the golden shrine. But I saw through their paint and worldliness, and was not in the humour even to amuse myself with them. But it

was wonderful; the more morose my bearing the more fascinating their ways; and no rudeness of mine could shake them off.

“When the gaiety was at its height a loud voice rang through the great hall calling for silence, and a gentleman stepped upon a pedestal. All eyes were turned towards him, every tongue was hushed. He held in his hand a golden tankard, and he commenced by saying that he had been asked to propose the health of the host of this princely entertainment. Before doing so he launched into an extravagant panegyric of the noble qualities of the man who had drawn together all the beauty, wit, and intellect of the city. Their host, said the orator, was a patron of the arts, a worshipper of the beautiful. Would there were more like him! (When I heard that I looked at his hump, and thought of my own.) The rudest case often contained the brightest jewel. Which was valued most, the fruit or its rind? Their host had the soul of a god.

“The hall rang with acclamations, and hundreds of voices testified to the value of the orator’s figures of speech. For my

part, I was weary and disgusted, and in the midst of the adulation I left the hall and sought the study. The gold still lay upon the carpet. Throwing myself upon it, I gave myself up to slumber. In less than an hour I was unceremoniously awakened.

“‘Rise and depart,’ cried the man who had called me brother; ‘you have missed fortune to-night. Had you excelled me in deformity I would have made you rich.’

“‘When I am tempted to rail at fate,’ I said, ‘I shall think of you. I thank you for the lesson you have given me. I see now what gold can buy.’

“‘Everything!’ he exclaimed triumphantly.

“‘Lip-service—yes,’ I said; ‘heart-service—never. Where is the woman who in her dreams would breathe your name in accents of love?’

“He shook his head sadly. ‘Go,’ he said with a sigh, ‘and leave me in my paradise. The shadow in the mirror is not real; but if it were not for its visions life would be a curse too heavy to bear.’

“‘I pity you. Pay me.’

“He pointed to the money on the ground,

and bade me take as much as I pleased. I took six pieces. He regarded me with wonder.

“ ‘Take more,’ he said.

“ ‘No,’ I answered, ‘you may need it one day.’

“ ‘Have I not told you I have more than I can spend? Before I was born men were hoarding for me. I have so much gold that I have had my coffin made of it.’

“ He drew back a panel in the wall, and in the recess, truly enough, lay a coffin of massive gold. Strong as I was, I could not lift it.

“ ‘It is not as light as an angel’s wings,’ I said. ‘Do you intend to be buried in it?’

“ ‘Aye.’

“ ‘It is a dangerous conceit.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘Gold is the heaviest of all the metals. If anything happens to the earth, you and your coffin will sink to the bottomless pit.’

“ With that I took my departure, the sound of soft music dwelling in my ears.

“ I kept no count of the seasons that followed; hard fortune was my constant companion; I did not make one human

friend, and at the end of many years I confessed to myself that my venture into the world had been the direst failure that man had ever made. The fair face I had seen in my dreams the last night I had passed in Mauvain's house never crossed my path of life. 'Perhaps in another life,' I thought, 'I may meet with it.'

"A time came when I was in a desperate plight. Fever had weakened me; misfortune clung to me. Contemplating my future, I decided that the only course open to me—except death, which I could have reached quickly—was to return to the forest in which I had been born, and there spin out the remainder of my days.

"The moment the thought entered my mind I was comforted. That forest belonged to me, and I to it; in it were trees I had marked and slept under; walks with which my feet were familiar; woodland peeps, the remembrance of which brought a tender smile to my lips; mountain springs at which I had slaked my thirst. There was not a turn of the land which did not recall some incident in my life. Yes, my better spirit was there; the very

birds and squirrels would welcome me as a friend.

“I was a thousand miles away, and I endured incredible hardships before I reached it. During the whole of the seemingly interminable days that succeeded the first suggestion of my purpose, I was in a state of fever. Pain racked my bones, thirst tormented me. Do I say this to excite your pity for me, Evangeline? No, my child; these lines are the simple record of an unhappy life; most forlorn, wretched, and hopeless until you brought a gleam of sunshine into it which even on this dark night and in this lonely hut, within which no human voice but mine has ever been heard, sheds a light of gladness all around me. I have made Leontine familiar with your name. When I call it, as I do now, he starts to his feet, and looks around in pleasurable anticipation. She is not here, Leontine. Evangeline sleeps in the valley below. Good angels guard her dreams, and sweeten them.

“The weary road was traversed at last, and when my eyes met the first familiar landmark, an ancient beech-tree, in the

trunk of which I had cut a gigantic R, I placed my arms upon it, and kissed it more tenderly than I had ever kissed human face. I was no longer a stranger in the world ; I had a home.

“ My spirit’s gladness was an elixir. I went first to the old hut ; signs of habitation were about. Had my mother returned to it ? I called ; no voice answered me. I pushed open the door. My mother’s bed was at the farther end, and it was occupied. I stepped towards it, and on the straw mattress lay my mother, dead, and by her side, asleep, a child in whose curls the sunlight was playing.

CHAPTER IV.

RANF CLAIMS EVANGELINE AS HIS OWN.

“I STOOD like a man in a dream gazing upon this startling union of life and death—of death in its most chilling aspect, of life in its fairest. And yet, although it was apparent to me that the years that had passed since I last looked upon my mother’s face had not improved her, the manner of her death was such as she would have deserved had she lived a worthier life. Both sleep and death were peaceful, and the fresh pure breath of innocence flowed over the face of one from whose lips I had never heard the expression of a tender thought.

“My mother had not been long dead ; her body still retained the warmth of life but just departed. She must have hushed the child to sleep, and lying by her

side, have yielded up her spirit to its Creator. The fever of her life was spent. She had lived the full span, but I doubted if there existed a human creature who, hearing she had gone, would have said, 'Rest in peace!' Like a weed run to waste lay my mother; like a sweet and lovely flower lay the child. By what mysterious link were living sunrise and dead night united? I searched the hut for a clue, and I made two discoveries: one of a few pieces of gold in a wooden cup, the other of a Bible, on the fly-leaf of which was written in straggling characters which I recognized as my mother's, 'Ranf—Mauvain,' and beneath these names, another, 'Evangeline.' There was nothing strange in the circumstance of my mother thus bringing into association the two beings most closely connected with her life; but that their names should be written in a Bible! Here was matter for reflection. Not only to my knowledge had my mother never possessed a Bible, but I had never known her open the pages of one. The book I held then in my hand was small, and was fastened with silver clasps; some of the leaves stuck together, probably

from damp, a proof that it had been lately but little used. I put it carefully away, and it is now in the hut in which I am making this record.

“The discovery of the gold and the Bible afforded no clue to the mystery of the child’s presence; the third name, Evangeline, which I supposed to be the child’s, was not of any value as testimony. The only other unaccustomed object which rewarded my search was a baby’s shoe.

“It hurt me that the sleeping child should be so close to death, and I gathered and made a bed of dry leaves upon the ground, and softly raising the child, placed her upon it. A spirit of hope and happiness entered my heart as I held the beautiful flower in my arms. The child had been sent to me from heaven; faithfully would I guard the sacred trust.

“I carried the body of my mother from the hut, and laid it in the forest’s shade, in a spot suitable for a grave, which I determined to dig that night. Then I returned to the hut, and sat by the side of the child, waiting for her to awake. I felt that a terrible ordeal awaited me in the moment of her awaking from her slumber. If she

shrank from me, terrified at my uncouth appearance, I vowed never to meet the face of man again. I would go and herd with the beasts, as being fit only for the society of the lower creatures of the earth. A judgment was about to be pronounced upon me.

“The child opened her eyes, and looked at me calmly and without fear. I held out my arms to her, and she accepted the shelter. Tears of gratitude rolled down my beard. All my life I had been fighting with demons; now, an angel was on my side.

“I sat with her little hand in mine, and her soft cheek nestling against my hairy face. Only for a few moments did I allow myself the enjoyment of this new and wonderful happiness, being impressed with the necessity of finding a home for the child, in which she could receive womanly care and attention. I knew of but one such within easy distance, a house almost as lonely as my mother’s hut, in which in former years I had seen a woman at work; it was called the Forest Farm. Throwing an old shawl of my mother’s round the child, I proceeded in the direction of the

farm, taking with me the gold I had found in the cup. The sun was setting when I reached my destination. The rooks were clustering for rest ; an old man was driving a cow into a shed ; a dog rushed at me, and stood stock-still, arrested in his contemplated attack by my disregard of him, and another, a savage beast, secured by a stout chain, came from his kennel, and growled at me furiously. I took no notice of these creatures, but walked straight to the door of the farm-house, and pushing it open, saw the woman who lived there when I was a lad. She had grown prematurely old ; the healthy colour in her face had fled, and her hair was almost white. She stared at me in terror, and made as though she would fly from me.

“ ‘There is no cause for fear,’ I said ; ‘I am not a ghost. My name is Ranf.’ ”

“ ‘Ranf !’ she cried. ‘The deformed son of the evil woman in the hut yonder !’ ”

“ ‘The same,’ I replied. ‘I carry my credentials on my shoulders.’ ”

“ ‘The good Lord save us !’ she ejaculated. ”

“ ‘Amen,’ I said. ”

“ ‘ We heard that you were dead.’

“ ‘ It is not true, you see. You knew my mother.’

“ ‘ I have seen her.’

“ ‘ It is she who is dead.’

“ ‘ What is that to me ?’

“ ‘ Nothing. I have come to ask you to do a Christian act.’

“ ‘ I will have nothing to do with her !’ screamed the woman. ‘ I will not touch the witch !’

“ ‘ Witch or no witch,’ I said, discovering the reputation my mother had gained for herself, ‘ she is done with this world. I come on behalf of the living, not the dead. See here, dame ; you will not turn me away—you would not have the heart ! I have no home to offer this little one. She needs a woman’s care ; I have gold, and can pay you.’

“ ‘ Yes, yes,’ muttered the woman ; ‘ we are poor.’

“ My object was gained. I gave the child into her arms. She looked at our faces, comparing them.

“ ‘ Not yours ?’ she asked.

“ ‘ Mine,’ I replied boldly.

“ ‘ I have seen some of Nature’s tricks,’

she said, 'but never such a trick as this.'

" 'Nature owed me reparation,' I said, 'and she makes it in the form of this child. It is a trick on the right side, dame. Better the little one should be comely and fair than in my likeness.'

" 'It is better, yes, it is better ; but I am thinking of the mother.'

" 'The child has no mother.'

" 'Dead ?'

" 'Dead !' I repeated mechanically.

" Then, the woman's poverty being on my side, I made terms with her, paying her in advance, and saying I should come every day to see my child. So I tenderly kissed the little one and left her.

" It was night before I got back to my hut. Everything was as I had left it ; nothing had been disturbed. I was careful in my observation of things, deeming it possible that some person connected with the child would visit the hut. There was, however, no sign. Another duty was to be performed before I retired to rest ; my mother's grave was not yet dug. It was soon done, and in the solemn stillness of

the night I laid the inanimate clay in its forest bed. I covered it with sweet herbs and piled the earth above it. ‘Good-night, mother,’ I said; ‘your death has brought sunlight to my soul.’ Then I threw myself upon the bed of leaves I had made for Evangeline, and enjoyed such repose as had not visited me for years.

“I was up early in the morning, and off to the forest farm. The child had been well cared for, and to my delight recognized me. She came to me willingly, and I took her into the open, and talked and sang to her, making her laugh, and laughing with her. I was enjoying my own childhood, of which I had been robbed. Everything in earth and air wore a new robe, the robe of spring. The clouds were brighter, the earth more fragrant, the woodland voices sweeter, than they had ever been. Such happiness, Evangeline, did you bring to a man driven to the brink of despair by misfortune and injustice.

“Months passed without the occurrence of any event to disturb my new and better life. No person came near the hut to inquire for Evangeline; the mystery which surrounded her was not touched by

time. Needless to say here that it occupied my thoughts. From whom had my mother obtained the child, and for what reason had so sweet a flower been doomed to seclusion and to companionship utterly unsuitable to childhood? I could supply no answer to these questions, and fearful that my happiness should be disturbed, I kept myself secluded, and sought no society but that of Evangeline and the woman who had charge of her.

“I renewed my woodland studies. I had no longer any books to assist me, but I found sufficient to interest me in the forest around my hut. Who is it who said, placing his hand upon a mossy glade, ‘Beneath this palm is more than enough for the study of a lifetime’? It is true. We need not go abroad to learn.

“At length a new direction was given to the calm current of my life. The hunting season commenced, and as in the days of Mauvain’s prosperity, the forest resounded with the music of the horn, the barking of dogs, and the voices of men. I recognized at once the importance of this change, and out of the possibilities which might spring from it I could extract no good sign for me

or Evangeline. My thoughts naturally reverted to Mauvain. Had he returned from exile, and renewed his old life of selfish pleasures? Curiosity conquered prudence, and one morning I found myself on the road leading to the fine house in which I had left my mother when I went forth into the world. It was tenanted, and by a gay company. What did this forebode to me? Discovery? How to avoid it? To fly from the forest was not to be thought of. There was no place in the world for me, and I dared not subject Evangeline to a renewal of the sufferings I had undergone.

“I retraced my steps to the hut, so wrapt in thought that I did not observe the approach of a storm. Night came on quickly with the darkening of the clouds. The wind howled round my hut; the rain poured down in a deluge.

“It was only the day before that I had discovered the dream-flower; I had searched for it for weeks, the spot in which it originally grew having undergone change from tempest, perhaps from such a tempest as that now raging through the forest. It was well to be indoors on such a night. Heaven

help those poor creatures who, in such weather, have no roof to cover their heads!

“I was busy with the flowers, distilling the liquid from the slender stems, when, in the midst of the storm, I heard a beating at the door. Had discovery come? Had I been seen and tracked? I waited in silence. The knocking was renewed.

“‘Do the dead live here?’ cried a voice.

“‘No,’ I answered.

“‘Open the door!’ cried the man without, in an insolent tone, ‘or I will beat it down.’

“The threat did not alarm me; the door was securely barred, and more than a man’s strength was needed to force an entrance.

“‘Your tone is not civil,’ I said; ‘seek shelter elsewhere.’

“‘There is none near. I have a lady with me; for the love of God give her shelter till I obtain assistance to convey her home! If you refuse, it will be worse for you in fine weather than it is for us in foul!’

“I unbarred the door, and a man

entered, carrying in his arms a young and beautiful woman in a state of insensibility.

“ ‘Who in the devil’s name are you?’ he asked, when he had laid his burden down.

“ ‘A misshapen man,’ I replied, ‘upon whom you need not waste a thought. Do you belong to one of the hunting parties?’

“ ‘Yes, and having been overtaken by the storm, have lost our way in this bewildering forest. My lady here, whom I was attending, got separated from her party; her horse threw her, and mine ran away, like an ungrateful brute, when I jumped down to assist her.’

“ ‘What do you propose to do?’

“ ‘To go for a carriage, if you will show me a way out of this wilderness.’

“ ‘I asked him in which direction he wished to go, and he answered in the direction of Mauvain’s house. He did not mention Mauvain’s name, and for my part, troubled as I was by the thought that this adventure was almost certain to bring me bad fortune, I did not prompt him to it.

“ ‘The lady lay insensible upon the ground,

and I suggested that it would be best to wait till she recovered, lest she should be terrified at finding herself alone in my lonely hut. So we waited awhile, and presently she opened her eyes. Then the man, speaking in a more deferential tone than that he had used to me, explained to her the position of affairs, and begged her respectfully to keep within the shelter they had gained until he succeeded in bringing her a carriage to convey her from the forest. There was reason in his words, for the storm had increased in fury, and it was impossible for so delicate a creature to venture out in it afoot.

“‘But I cannot stay here alone,’ she said, after assenting to the plan; ‘it would be too terrible.’

“‘If you will have courage for a few minutes,’ I said, ‘I will return when I have shown your servant the way out of the forest.’

“She consented by a gesture, and I accompanied her servant from the hut, and put him on his road.

“‘If any one speaks to you of this,’ he said, ‘you will bear me harmless.’

“ ‘ You have a hard master, then ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Hard and soft,’ he replied.

“ ‘ I understand. Hard to those beneath him, soft to those above him.’

“ ‘ You are right and wrong ; it is dangerous to anger him.’

“ ‘ Is the lady his wife ? ’

“ ‘ No.’

“ ‘ His daughter ? ’

“ ‘ No.’

“ ‘ A blood relation, then ? ’

“ ‘ Ask no more questions. What she is to him and he to her is none of your business.’

“ ‘ True. I will hold you harmless on one condition.’

“ ‘ It is cool of you to make conditions. What am I to do in return ? ’

“ ‘ Say nothing of me. Do not mention that you have seen such a man as I in the forest.’

“ ‘ That is easy. Agreed.’

“ ‘ Enough said, then. Follow this path to the left for a quarter of a mile, and you will see the house before you.’

“ I was about to leave him when he laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“ ‘I warn you,’ he said. ‘Be civil to my lady, or you will find yourself in a hornet’s nest.’

“ ‘You are more fool than knave,’ I replied. ‘Speed swiftly back, and take my lady home to my lord.’

“ I myself sped quickly to my hut, with a feeling curiously mingled of pity and contempt for the fair creature to whom I had given shelter. ‘What she is to him and he to her is none of your business.’ These words branded the woman with shame.

“ But when I saw her sitting at my table with an expression of deepest sadness on her face, pity only filled my breast. Truly she was fair, and innocent, and pure-minded, unless Nature lied. Her servant had maligned her.

“ ‘I returned as soon as I could,’ I said; ‘I will stay outside the hut if you wish it.’

“ ‘Why should you do that?’ she asked, with a wistful look.

“ ‘I am not generally a favourite,’ I said bluntly; ‘my shape is against me.’

“ ‘You are to be pitied for it.’

“ Her plaintive voice brought tears to

my eyes, and she, observing them, asked me to pardon her.

“‘You have seen misfortune,’ she said.

“‘The bitterest; but I have lived through it. It is not often that man or woman, looking upon me for the first time, have given me greeting as gentle as yours.’

“‘I, too, have seen misfortune,’ she said with a sigh. ‘Do you live here alone?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Have you no kindred? Are you utterly, utterly alone?’

“‘No,’ I said softly, ‘I have a child.’

“She turned from me with a sob of grief, and for a little while no further words were spoken. I wondered to see so young and winsome a woman in such trouble, but life’s storms spare neither high nor low, rich nor poor. It occurred to me that her sorrow might have some association with a child, and I was about to ask her, when I noticed (her left hand being ungloved) that she wore no wedding-ring; so I refrained, and waited until she chose to break the silence.

“‘You have a child! How happy you must be! A girl?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘I hope not—’ But she stopped suddenly, and bit her lip, red blood flushing her face.

“‘No,’ I said, ‘not like me. She is well formed.’

“‘I am glad—forgive me.’

“‘There is nothing to forgive.’

“‘Love is expressed in your voice. You would not like to lose your child.’

“‘I should not care to live without her.’

“‘She shivered, as though she were cold. There was a fire in the hut, and I urged her to draw nearer to it for warmth, but she refused. On the table, imbedded in earth, lay some shoots of the dream-flower. She asked the name of the flower, and I told her.

“‘The dream-flower!’ she said, in a low tone. ‘Does it really make you dream?’

“‘It has in it qualities which induce sleep, and, sometimes, happy dreams.’

“‘Ah!’ she sighed. “‘If I could dream my life over again! Of what might have been! Of love so sweet and beautiful, of

love so base and treacherous! I should commence with my childhood, and I should linger there, among calm and happy days. Let me think of them, let me think of them, and of those who loved me! If I could have died then, with loving hands clasping mine! But it was not to be. I was doomed to live and suffer. Father, sister, child, torn from me—'

"She had risen, and was standing by the side of a shelf on which was the baby's shoe I had found in the hut on my return home. She took it from the shelf, and pressing it to her lips, burst into a passion of blinding tears, and sank to the ground, crying,—

" 'Oh, baby! baby! Oh, my heart! my heart!'

"While I was contemplating this picture of despair, doubly strange in one who was herself but a child in years, the lady's servant returned, and others with him. Outside the hut I heard the pawing of horses' feet. Seeing his mistress in tears upon the ground, the man raised his whip threateningly.

" 'I warned you to be civil to my lady,' he said.

“ ‘Be careful,’ I cried, with a look which prevented the blow ; ‘if you strike, your life will be in danger.’ ”

“The lady rose, and stood between us.

“ ‘You forget,’ she said to her servant, with more dignity than I had supposed her to be capable of, ‘that this man has given me the shelter of his roof.’ And turning to me, she held out her hand, and said in a tone of much sweetness, ‘I thank you, friend.’ ”

“I touched her hand, and bent my head to her ; I was more than repaid. Soon she was gone, and the storm was raging round her ; but there was a more enduring storm in her young heart. Friendless, too, she appeared to be, and dependent on herself, despite that she was surrounded by servants who addressed her as ‘My lady.’ ”

“It was not until an hour afterwards that I discovered she had taken the baby’s shoe with her.

“During the night I thought much of her ; her grief, her youth, her beauty, her apparent innocence and inexperience, had deeply impressed me. In the sobbing of the storm I seemed to hear the echo of her

wail, ‘Oh, baby, baby! Oh, my heart, my heart!’ And with the eyes of my mind I saw her slight and delicate figure winding its way through the mournful forest, searching for love that was dead. These thoughts kept me awake; and I was also in some anxiety about myself, deeming it almost certain that the adventure was the prelude to more startling events.

“This proved to be the case. I did not visit Evangeline on the following day, fearing that I might be watched and tracked. In the afternoon two gentlemen on horseback drew up at my hut, and, alighting, gave their horses in charge of a groom who attended them. The gentlemen conversed together for a few moments, and it appeared as if one were trying to persuade the other to come into my hut with him. I saw their actions through the crevice of my door, which was not quite closed, but I did not see the faces of the gentlemen, their backs being towards me. The younger man shook his head, and waving his hand around—with an air of affectation, as it appeared to me—threw himself languidly upon the ground, and interlacing his fingers behind his head, gazed up at the

clouds through the intervening leaves and branches. The other gentleman uncere-
moniously pushed open the door, and
entered.

“Before me stood Mauvain.

“The same easy, polished gentleman as
of old, richly dressed, arrogant, superci-
lious, and bearing, as he always did, the air
of a man accustomed to be obeyed. Time
had dealt lightly with him; something he
may have owed to art, but he seemed
scarcely five years older than when I left
him on the seashore quite fifteen years ago.
He regarded me with a smile.

“‘Ranf,’ he said, in a quiet, question-
ing tone; ‘not his spirit?’

“‘Ranf,’ I replied, ‘in solid flesh and
bone.’

“‘I am delighted,’ he said.

“‘It is a good thing,’ I said, imitating
his tone of courteous banter, ‘to be able
to delight so fine a gentleman.’

“‘Whimsical as ever. It is surprising.’

“‘That I am whimsical?’

“‘That you are alive. It is—if you will
pardon me—really astonishing.’

“‘I pardon you readily. The unfortu-
nate have an unfortunate knack of living.’

“ ‘Your philosophy has ripened. Ranf, did you know I had returned from exile?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘You did not take the trouble to ascertain?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘I did not wish to be troubled.’

“ ‘You believed I should trouble you if our paths in life crossed again?’

“ ‘I was sure of it. It is your way.’

“ ‘Truly, it is my way. Myself first, others afterwards. A selfish nature, I am afraid.’

“ ‘You are a good judge.’

“ ‘Ranf, in all my experiences I have never met a shrewder observer than yourself, nor a shrewder reader of character.’

“ ‘Shall I read yours?’ I asked.

“ ‘For Heaven’s sake, no!’ he cried, laughing heartily and gently; in his angriest moods Mauvain was never violent. ‘Spare me, I beg.’

“ He went to the door, and called, ‘Harold!’ and receiving no answer, called again, ‘Harold!’ and walking to the spot

where his friend was lying, leant over him. I stood on the threshold observing his movements.

“ ‘The fellow is asleep,’ he said, rejoining me, ‘dreaming of the fantastic and impossible. Like myself, Ranf, a man of sentiment. Well, let him sleep; you and I can talk together more privately. I will take a seat, if you will allow me.’ I pointed to one, and he continued: ‘I can hear the sound of the waves beating on the shore; I can feel the fresh morning air blowing on my hot cheeks. In the light of a beautiful sunrise, we spoke some hard truths to each other.’

“ ‘You expressed, in your fashion, gratitude for the service I rendered you.’

“ ‘I remember; you were scarcely more complimentary to me, but what I said I meant.’

“ ‘I was not less sincere. Sometimes, after you were gone, I wondered how it had fared with you.’

“ ‘And I,’ said Mauvain, in his pleasantest tone, ‘never wasted a thought upon you.’

“ ‘It was like you. Were you long away?’

“ ‘ It is eight years since fortune threw a feather to me across the silver seas, upon which I floated back to my native land.’

“ ‘ You speak as though you were not happy in exile.’

“ ‘ Who is? No; I was not happy, although the land which sheltered me is the fairest on earth’s surface, a land of happiness and contentment and plenty, a very paradise for those without ambition. But I am almost forgetting; I came here to reward you for your attention to a fair friend of mine.’

“ ‘ You owe me for more than that.’

“ ‘ I do not dispute it; I owe you my life. I admit it frankly; I am in your debt, and shall be glad to repay you. If I remember aright, you did not accept from me one piece of gold.’

“ ‘ Your memory serves you faithfully. I did not accept from you one piece of gold.’

“ ‘ You did not even ask for it.’

“ ‘ I did not even ask for it.’

“ He frowned, and there was no friendliness in his eyes as they rested on my face, but I knew that the advantage was

entirely on my side so long as he believed himself to be in my debt.

“‘Ask now,’ he said, drawing a full purse from his pocket. ‘My fair friend regretted she had not her purse with her last night.’

“‘I am sorry to hear it; I gave her credit for a higher nature.’

“‘Why, hunchback! You did not look for any other kind of reward.’

“‘She thanked me; that was enough.’

“‘You have not named a sum,’ said Mauvain impatiently.

“‘I am not to be paid in gold,’ I said. ‘The fairest land on earth’s surface which you have described must be a favoured spot indeed. Is it inhabited by spirits?’

“‘By human beings, Ranf—veritable men, women, and children, charmingly simple in their habits and modes of life; industrious, frugal, virtuous. Flowing with milk and honey is the Silver Isle, and with the milk of human kindness. Rare enough you must have found this latter quality, Ranf. You have wrestled with the world, I do not doubt, and have found out how strong it is.’

“I considered before I replied. Another

life more precious than my own was in my keeping. A strange idea was forming itself in my mind. To be rid of the gnawing anxiety which beset my days ; to leave the false world behind me, and commence a new life in another land where I was not known, and where I could watch over Evangeline and see her grow into beautiful womanhood ! Such a prospect contained possibilities which made my pulse beat high.

“ ‘ I gained one victory,’ I said.

“ ‘ Not riches, evidently.’

“ ‘ No.’

“ ‘ Nor fame.’

“ ‘ No.’

“ ‘ What, then ?’

“ ‘ Love.’

“ He stared at me in astonishment, a proof that the lady who had visited me the previous night was not in sympathy with him. Had there been perfect confidence between them, she would have related to Mauvain the substance of our conversation.

“ ‘ You !’ he exclaimed.

“ ‘ Even I, deformed as I am.’

“ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘ There is no accounting for a woman’s vagaries. Does she live ?’

“ ‘Who ?’

“ ‘The woman who threw herself away upon you.’

“ ‘The only human tie I have in the world is a child. Question me no further on the subject; my tongue is sealed.’

“ ‘I declare in good faith,’ said Mauvain, ‘that you have in you some of the instincts of a gentleman.’”

“ ‘I declare in good faith,’ I retorted, ‘judging the instincts of a gentleman by your code, that if I thought I possessed them and could cut them out of my body, I would do so.’”

“ ‘You are prone to strong utterances,’ said Mauvain, with imperturbable good humour. ‘Were I not in your debt, you should smart for your insolence.’

“ ‘There is an easy way out of it, if you care to take it.’

“ ‘I promise you to take it, if it is in my power.’

“ ‘I can depend upon your promise, I know. Mauvain, you do not need me, even for revenge.’

“ ‘In sober truth, Ranf, I think I could exist without you.’

“ ‘And I without you. I am sick of

civilization and the world's treatment. Dependent upon me is a child whom I love and who loves me. Would the inhabitants of the Silver Isle be willing to do you a service?'

" 'My name is honoured there; they would be glad to render me a service.'

" 'Then give me and my child a free passport there, accompanied by such a recommendation as will ensure us a welcome. When that is accomplished, we will cry quits.'

" 'A whimsical idea,' he said, looking at me with mingled amusement and thoughtfulness; 'a very Caliban in an enchanted isle. You would need strong credentials, Ranf, or you would scarcely be welcomed.'

" 'It is not for myself I ask this,' I said; 'it is for the sake of my child.'

" 'You have my promise; I will endeavour to gratify you.'

" He glanced through the open door at his friend, who had not shifted his position.

" 'Harold,' he called, 'are you still asleep?'

" 'Wide awake, Mauvain.'

“ ‘Put life into your sluggish limbs, and come here instantly.’ ”

“ It appeared to be a difficult task for Harold to accomplish, but it was done in time, and he sauntered lazily towards us.

“ A handsomer man even than Mauvain, and between twenty and thirty years younger; a man evidently cut in the same mould—disdainful, high-bred, and holding in contempt those beneath him.

“ The moment he saw me he took from his pocket a small book, and made a sketch of me.

“ ‘Harold,’ said Mauvain——

“ ‘One moment, Mauvain,’ cried Harold; ‘such an opportunity comes but once in life. There! I think I have it. Human?’ ”

“ ‘Answer him, Ranf,’ said Mauvain.

“ But I turned away, choked with rage. Although my face was from them, I saw a smile on Mauvain’s lips, produced by the thought that his friend had succeeded in wounding me in a vulnerable part.

“ ‘Yes, Harold,’ said Mauvain, ‘human.’ ”

“ ‘Taken from the life,’ said Harold, showing his sketch, and they both laughed at it.

“Unable to control myself, I plucked the book from Harold’s hand, and tearing the sketch into a hundred pieces, flung it to the air.

“‘You are right, Mauvain,’ said Harold; ‘very human.’

“‘By the way, Ranf,’ said Mauvain, addressing me as though nothing of a disturbing nature had occurred, ‘you have not told me whether this child of yours is a boy or a girl.’

“‘A girl,’ I answered.

“‘A child, too!’ exclaimed Harold softly.

“‘Harold,’ said Mauvain, ‘I am in want of a friend to execute a delicate commission for me. May I select you as that friend?’

“‘You may command me, Mauvain,’ replied Harold, in utter indifference, ‘in any way you please.’

“‘In obliging me, you shall oblige yourself.’

“‘Pray,’ said Harold, ‘do not think of me. Think only of yourself.’

“I gave the young man a sharp look, wondering whether this home-thrust were accidental or intentional, but I could not

read his face. Its only expression was an expression of weariness.

“‘You need rest,’ continued Mauvain, ‘repose ; you have been burning the candle at both ends, Harold.’

“‘What does it matter, Mauvain?’ asked Harold; ‘it must be burnt out to-day, or to-morrow. A year or two more or less is of the smallest importance.’

“‘If you have no care for yourself, Harold, your friends must have some for you.’

“‘It is kind of them,’ murmured Harold, ‘of you especially, Mauvain, who have so much pleasure to think of. But I am really not worth the trouble.’

“So perfect was his manner, whether it were real or assumed, that, despite the angry feelings he had excited in me, I could not help regarding him with interest.

“‘Often and again have you sighed for simplicity, Harold—’

“‘I have searched for it all my life.’

“‘I wish you to go for me to a country where its spirit dwells. The voyage will do you good. You will thank me.’

“ ‘I do not doubt it. A long voyage, Mauvain?’

“ ‘You will be absent, I should say, not more than three months.’

“ ‘I will go,’ said Harold, ‘to the ends of the earth to serve you. You would do the same for me.’

“ ‘I am not so sure, Harold. You will have companions.’

“ ‘Yes?’

“ ‘This man,’ said Mauvain, pointing to me—

“ ‘I shall be charmed. You are too considerate.’

“ ‘And his daughter.’

“ ‘A double inducement.’

“ ‘I am under an obligation to this man, and he has indicated how I can repay it. Harold, he saved my life.’

“ ‘Really!’

“ ‘There are certain things against him, but his word is to be trusted. For instance, if he says he hates you, you may be sure he means it. And what he may do against you, he will do in the light of day.’

“ ‘You give him a high character, Mauvain, and I take him at your word.

I have no objection to an honest tiger. What I object to—if I object to anything, which I am not sure, it is so troublesome to object—is the rat or the fox.’

“ ‘You will act as my deputy, Harold?’

“ ‘On one condition, Mauvain. I am really sorry to make it, but it is necessary. There are matters upon which I am delicately sensitive, and in which I have no control over myself. It is not my fault; I came into the world so. As did our friend here, with certain imperfections, which he would have rejected, had it been in his power. These things are beyond us; we must accept them. Excuse me for making a long speech; but you know I have a horror of a cross eye in man or woman.’

“ Mauvain listened, amused, and nodded his head; he was no stranger to his friend’s whims.

“ ‘Then,’ continued Harold, in the same languid tone, ‘I fly from red hair; I faint at the sight of a rat; and I would sooner die than live with a woman without eye-brows.’

“ ‘What is your condition, Harold?’

“‘I must see the child before I bind myself irrevocably.’

“‘What do you say, Ranf?’ said Mauvain.

“‘I did not hesitate; I knew that in determination this languid young gentleman, who scarcely spoke above his breath, was my equal.

“‘I consent,’ I replied.

“‘Is there time this evening?’

“‘No; if your friend will meet me here to-morrow morning, I will take him to see my child.’

“‘I will be here,’ said Harold.

“So it was arranged, and they left me, and I watched their forms fading in the green twilight until they were lost to my sight.

“Before noon Harold presented himself on horseback, his groom behind him, holding the reins of a spare horse. He desired me to mount, and we rode in silence to the forest farm, where the woman brought Evangeline out to meet me. In an instant I was off the horse, and the child was in my arms. Receiving her caresses, and caressing her, I did not for a little while pay attention to Harold,

and when, remembering that the happiness of my life depended upon him, I turned to where he sat motionless in the saddle, I noticed that his face was white as death.

“ ‘Are you satisfied?’ I asked.

“ ‘Perfectly,’ he replied. ‘I want a kiss from the little maid.’

“I raised Evangeline to his height, and he took her in his arms, and kissed her.

“ ‘There is no time to lose,’ he then said; ‘I must return at once to Mauvain. Come, let us ride fast.’

“We rode so fast that I could scarcely keep up with him; only once did he stop, reining up so suddenly that his horse reared upon its haunches.

“ ‘You have set your heart upon this,’ he said.

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Remember, then, that the gratification of your wish depends upon me, and that I have my moods as well as worse men.’

“It was the only time I heard him speak with energy, and the next moment he appeared to be aware that his excited

manner was not in consonance with his character. He relapsed into indolence, the colour came back to his face, and we rode more slowly. It happened that we met Mauvain riding with his friends. He separated from them, and cantered towards us.

“ ‘Well, Harold ?’ he said.

“ ‘To my surprise, Harold began to laugh and hold his sides.

“ ‘I have seen her, Mauvain,’ he said, continuing to laugh between his words, ‘and I thank you for giving me two charming companions.’

“ ‘You will go, then ?’

“ ‘I will go, having seen the child.’

“ ‘I am curious about her. What is she like ?’

“ ‘Look in the hunchback’s face,’ replied Harold, ‘and behold her living image. Poor child ! But what else was to be expected ? And, after all, it is none of our business. Nature throws our sins at our doors, and wise men make haste to bury them. They rise from their graves sometimes, but only cowards are frightened by them. The true philosophy of life is the pursuit of pleasure. Ah ! to live in a land

where it is always summer ! Mauvain, if I die before you—and I believe I shall, my heart is so weak—bury me in flowers ; or, if you prefer it, burn me to ashes, and plant a rose-tree in my dust. When shall we sail for the Silver Isle ? ’

“ ‘ I have a vessel which can sail in a week. ’

“ ‘ The sooner the better. Dismount, hunchback ; you can find your way back to your hut afoot. ’

“ He also dismounted, and walked aside with me.

“ ‘ You have something to ask me, ’ he said.

“ ‘ Why have you deceived Mauvain ? ’

“ ‘ Because I know him, and because I wish to serve the sweet maid you call your child. You should be content. ’

“ ‘ I shall be if, after I have shaken the dust of the old world from my feet, I never look upon your face, or the face of your friend again. ’

“ ‘ That is as fate wills. I will not promise, hunchback. Life is full of surprises. Observe those leaves travelling with the wind. Which is the master, leaf or air ? ’

“He left me, and in a week we were on the sea. On the day of our departure Harold handed me a letter from Mauvain. It contained but a few words—these :—

“‘I know not what name you have given your child. It will insure you a hearty welcome from the inhabitants of the Silver Isle if you call her by a name which is dear to them—Evangeline.’

CHAPTER V.

“IT MAY HAPPEN.”

“I ADDRESS these concluding lines to you, Evangeline, child of my heart.

“Thus far have I related all that is necessary of my life beyond these silver seas, and all that I knew of yours. One day it may be of importance to you to be acquainted with the particulars, for, as Harold truly observed, ‘Life is full of surprises.’

“Something yet remains to be told. Harold, I learned, was a sculptor, and was poor. Mauvain was at once his friend and patron. Harold might have achieved distinction, had he cared to win it, but his indolent nature stopped the way. Whatever may have been Mauvain’s true feeling for Harold, I became convinced that Harold estimated his patron’s character at its proper worth. Had I cared to speak in

terms of disparagement of his wealthier patron he would have resented it; none the less did he hold him in despal.

“I have taken some pains to delineate the characters of these gentlemen; I wish you to understand them.

“I read Mauvain’s last letter to me over and over again. It was extraordinary that he should choose for you a name you already bore. He could not have been aware that beneath his name and mine in the Bible I had found in my mother’s hut was written the name of Evangeline, which I naturally supposed to be yours. Was, then, the circumstance of his desiring me to introduce you to the inhabitants of the Silver Isle by that name merely a coincidence, or was it part of a chain yet to be unwound?

“I determined to sound Harold upon the point. Between the young sculptor and myself no feeling of confidence existed. He looked upon me as a creature so immeasurably beneath him, and was so painstaking, in his insolent way, of impressing it upon me, that a man with less control over himself than I possess would not have tamely submitted to it. But I have learned

life's lessons, and only upon rare occasions do my passions succeed in overpowering my reason.

“Harold had evinced a desire to amuse himself with me, but it is not in my nature to truckle to any man, and I, being as free of tongue as he, we had come to a tacit understanding to have little to say to each other.

“I must be just to him. He took a sentimental pleasure in your society, but I do not believe he ever uttered a word against me in your presence. This was so loyal that I could not help admiring him for it; few men would have refrained from stabbing one whom they disliked as cordially as he disliked me.

“He was lying on the deck with a book of poetry in his hand, which he was idly reading, when I approached and stood before him. He did not raise his eyes, but, with matchless insolence, murmured, as though he had just come to the line,—

“‘And men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders! The quotation is pat, for one stands before me. Thrust for thrust, hunchback; I am ready.’

“‘I am above those taunts,’ I said; ‘they no longer wound me.’

“‘I lied when I made that boast, and he knew that I lied.

“‘At least you have courage,’ he remarked.

“‘I need it,’ I replied. ‘But it is not of myself I care to speak. I wish to have a word with you about the little maid.’

“‘Evangeline?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘It is cruel of you. This is the dreaming time of day.’ (The sun was shining full upon him.) ‘The effort of thinking, much less of speaking, is exhausting.’

“‘It is almost a pity that the trouble of living should have been thrust upon you.’

“He laughed quietly. ‘I thought you would not be able to resist. It is indeed a pity. We should be consulted—it is an injustice.’

“‘There is an easy way out of it,’ I said, glancing at the calm and beautiful sea.

“He looked at the water with peaceful eyes, and said, ‘No, hunchback. I will wait. Proceed with your business.’

“ ‘We are near the end of our voyage.’

“ ‘I am happy in the reflection that we shall soon part company.’

“ ‘On the day I first set foot on this vessel you gave me a letter from Mauvain.’

“ ‘Did I? Ah, yes; I remember.’

“ ‘In that letter he desired me to call my little maid by the name of Evangeline. Are you acquainted with his reason for doing so?’

“ He did not reply immediately, but sat looking out in silence upon the sea. Presently he brushed his hand across his eyes, and murmured,—

“ ‘Visions! Have you Mauvain’s letter about you?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Let me read it.’

“ I gave it to him, and he read it aloud, repeating the opening words, ‘I know not what name you have given your child.’ Then he returned the letter to me, and said: ‘In the isle for which we are bound there was once a maiden named Evangeline, whom the islanders hold in tender remembrance. Mauvain has told me the story. That may have been his reason.’

“‘I thank you. It is a sufficient reason.’

“I was about to leave him when he called to me to stay.

“‘It is my turn now,’ he said. ‘When you take up your residence on this wonderful isle—which might almost be supposed to be one of Mauvain’s fanciful creations—it will not be of advantage to Evangeline that she shall be supposed to be your child. Even if I admit, for the sake of argument, that she is yours, which I do not believe’—(he paused here, and looked at me steadily for a moment or two in silence)—‘which I do not believe,’ he repeated languidly, ‘it will be best to represent Evangeline as an orphan. You have your secrets, hunchback, I do not doubt, and I do not seek to penetrate them. A man’s mind is a prison-house; there are cells in it whose doors we keep tightly sealed until some momentous event forces them open, and lets in the light we dread. You will understand me, although I speak in enigmas. Do not trouble yourself to ask me another question, for I should not answer it. Rest content in this knowledge; leaving you and Evangeline on the

Silver Isle, I shall return to Mauvain, with no definite idea of ever meeting you or the little maid again. But it may happen. Man is not a responsible being—responsible neither for villainy nor virtue. If it is in me to be virtuous, I must be so, will I, nill I—no credit to me for it. If it is in me to be a knave, a knave I must be, will I, nill I—no blame to me for it. The doctrine of responsibility is one that is either ridiculously misunderstood or wilfully ignored—the latter most likely, because of its awkwardness. We do not create or form our own emotions, passions, feelings. I am born with a jealous nature; I love a woman passionately; another man steps between us, and makes me suffer. The woman, a coquette, as all women are naturally, plays with both of us with delicacy and finesse, and one hour I am in heaven, the next in hell. In a moment of fury, opportunity serving, I kill my rival. I am really not accountable, and if you choose to call it murder and punish me for it, you are punishing me for having been born with certain moral forces which direct and control every action of my being. What is, is. No man knows what

is before him ; and although I shall part from you and our little maid with no idea of ever meeting you again, it may happen, as I have said, that our lines of life may strangely cross in the future. I really believe, hunchback, that this is the longest speech I ever made. Pardon me for it, I beg ; I will not offend again.'

"With that he closed his eyes, and appeared to sleep ; and during the remainder of our voyage, all that passed between us was expressive of the desire to see as little of each other as possible. Whatever may have been his motive in speaking to me as he did, I recognized that he was right with respect to you. Were it supposed that you were my child, it would be a distinct disadvantage to you. Therefore, when the islanders asked me if you were an orphan, I told them to accept you as such. As such you are regarded ; and so far as I know, you are one.

"So for the night I bring my labour to an end, and lay aside my pen. Leontine is asleep ; my white doves are at rest. And in the valley below, you, Evangeline, are also at rest. Good-night. I sleep, dreaming of you."

CHAPTER VI.

RANF'S DIARY CONTINUED.

“UNEXPECTEDLY to myself, I continue my diary.

“The night has passed, and the day. I am able to move more freely, and to-morrow I hope to make my way to the lower hut, to look after my goats, and dogs, and birds. In a little while I shall be quite well.

“The night has been a strange one, and may lead to important results.

“Whether it was that the recalling of certain incidents caused me to dwell upon details which had not made much impression upon me, or because I was in a state of nervousness produced by my narrow escape when endeavouring to pluck the flower on the mountain's top, I cannot say; but contrary to my usual habit, I could not sleep for longer than a few

minutes, or perhaps moments, at a time. All through the night I was in a condition of wakefulness: now dozing, with confused pictures in my mind, now awake and striving to pierce the darkness, which seemed to be thronged with moving figures. Now and then the confused tangle of pictures and faces assumed some kind of order from which a distinct impression could be gained, and of these the most distinct was the recurrence of two faces—the face of Margaret Sylvester and that of the lady who had sought the shelter of my hut the night before Mauvain visited me. At first I saw no meaning in this conjunction, but gradually it dawned upon me that there was a likeness between these two faces, although one was fair and the other dark, and I beguiled myself into studying the shadowy presentments. The longer I dwelt upon them the stronger grew the likeness, until I began to believe that there was really a meaning in the resemblance. I determined not to let the matter slip, but to make some quiet inquiry into it. Margaret Sylvester has already told me that she is not a native of the Silver Isle, and from the few chance words that have

reached me with reference to her I have learnt that she and her husband and her husband's father led for some years a life of adventure in places not unfamiliar to me. I have already described in these pages that the lady to whom I had given shelter seemed to me to be friendless; and at one time in the night I was startled by the memory of her expression of grief when she was lamenting that father, sister, child had been torn from her. She, Harold, Mauvain, and Evangeline appear to be connected by invisible links, and now this likeness between the lady and Margaret Sylvester added another to the chain. It is because this chain of circumstance surrounds Evangeline, whose future happiness is my only care in life, that I am anxious to arrive at some understanding of it.

“Accident has already placed me in possession of a wonderful piece of evidence, and that is why, after I had finished my recital of those events affecting Evangeline, which I deemed it proper she should be made acquainted with when she is a woman, I continue the recital with the words ‘Unexpectedly to myself, I continue

my diary.' The dreams which haunted me in the night would not have been in themselves sufficient to warrant me to resume my pen; but what occurred this evening determined me.

"Prosaic people who believe in nothing but what they see and touch might ask, 'What can occur to a man living alone in a hut on a deserted range, thousands of feet above the level of the sea?' It would be waste of breath to answer them. Men may live for the hour, but they live not only in the hour. What is done leaves its mark. We can bury bodies, but we cannot bury ghosts.

"The door of my hut was open; the balmy air floated in; the evening was calm and peaceful. The white dove that rapped at my door last night had flown backwards and forwards, from hut to hut, all the day. An hour ago it flew in, panting, and, dashing its wings against the wall, fell to the ground in an agony of fear. After it flew a wild hawk, one of a brood I thought I had destroyed. An eye for an eye, with these destroyers of my innocent birds; I will drive them from the mountain. As the hawk swooped down upon my dove,

Leontine leapt upon it, seized it, and carried it, mangled and bloody, from the hut. I picked up my dove and held it close to me, its fluttering heart beating against my own. Presently I released it, and the bird flew into the dove-cote. Then I notice that a shelf in the hut had been thrown down by Leontine; the articles it had held were strewn upon the ground. I picked them up, and among them was the Bible, with silver clasps, in which Mauvain's name and mine and Evangeline's were written by my mother. The clasps had been loosened and the leaves disordered by the shock. I sat at my table with the intention of arranging the leaves and fixing the clasps.

“I have mentioned that when I first found the Bible in my mother's hut, I noticed that some of the leaves stuck together, as I supposed from damp. My idea was not correct; the leaves had been purposely gummed together, and I now discovered that this had been done for the purpose of concealing sheets of thin paper covered with small fine writing. This must have escaped my mother's notice, and might never have been discovered by me but for

the murderous flight of the hawk after my innocent white dove.

“What was I about to discover?”

“I carefully examined every page of the Bible, and succeeded in extracting ten of these sheets covered on both sides with fine writing. It was not difficult to judge that the writer had written in secrecy, and at intervals of time, for occasionally there were sudden breaks in the manuscript, as though she had been interrupted unexpectedly, and was fearful of being discovered. I transcribe here what I read in those pages so strangely discovered, simply stating that the story of the betrayal is related by Marguerite’s sister, Clarice.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TESTIMONY IN THE BIBLE.

“ ‘I CAN endure this suspense no longer ; it is fourteen days since I saw Marguerite. How often have I counted the hours which make up each day ! To-morrow she will come, I am told, and I wait and wait, and watch the clock, and to-morrow comes, but does not bring Marguerite. Again I am told she will come to-morrow, and again I wait and watch and count the minutes, and bless the sunlight that brings to-morrow, and run to the door a hundred times, thinking I hear Marguerite’s footsteps—only to be disappointed. Why does she keep away from me ? I loved her always—she is sister, mother, all in the world to me ! Why does she not come ? Oh, why does she not come ? I am so afraid of not being able to remember all that passes that I think to myself I will

write it down, and then Marguerite can read it, and as she reads I can interrupt her and tell her things I have forgotten. And she will kiss me and hold me in her arms, and I shall be happy once more. If she would but come now, this very minute, and call outside, "Clarice! Clarice!" Hark! Do I really hear her? No, it is fancy.

"I do not want any person to see this but Marguerite, and if she were here this minute I would tear it up, as I have torn up letters written to her which were never sent. What was the use of writing letters when Marguerite was coming? But she does not come, and I am in despair. What has happened to her? Is she dead? And our cruel master—where is he? Ah, I hope not with Marguerite, tormenting her, torturing her, as he has done to both of us since our dear father's death. Father! why did you deliver us over to that hard man, whose only aim has been to make us wretched? But you did not know—no, you could not have known!

* * * * *

"Another week has gone by, and I have not seen Marguerite. I get no op-

portunity to write. Again and again have I commenced, and been interrupted. What am I writing! I am asked. Nothing, I reply; and then the gentleman who begs me call him Harold asks to look at the paper, and I tear it into a thousand pieces and will not let him see. "Child," he says with a smile, "you have no need to tear it up; if you gave me an open letter, telling me to keep it for a year and not look at it, I should obey you." No one could treat me with greater respect. He speaks to me as if I were a princess. But I am not a princess. I am only a poor dancing-girl, and I want my sister Marguerite! I am obliged to keep my writing secret. Not because of this gentleman or his friends, but because of the woman who attends me, and who watches me, as I have discovered, when she supposes I am not on my guard. "What have you there, my dear?" she asks. I tell her an old letter, and she nods and smiles. Are people who are always smiling when you are in trouble deceitful? This woman is, I know, for I have detected her searching my clothes in the middle of the night, when she believed I was asleep. This

makes me all the more anxious to write and keep it from her. I have gone to sleep with the paper in my hand tight, and in the morning, when I woke, I have not been able to read a word. So I have discovered a way. My dear old Testament, with the silver clasps, that my beloved father gave me; I will write what I care to write, and conceal it between the pages. She will never find it there.

* * * * *

“The woman who is given to me as a companion continues to watch my movements in an extraordinary manner. I asked her this morning whether she was paid to do it, and she replied, with detestable smiles, that she was only doing what was for my good. This means so much that I shall speak to Harold about it.

* * * * *

“I have spoken to Harold. I told him that the woman was watching me. He said surely not, and seemed to ask it as a question. I told him that I saw her searching my clothes in the middle of the night, when she supposed me to be asleep. He said that was sufficient; the woman should be discharged; and added: “If you

wish it." When I replied that she made me feel uncomfortable, he said that he would send her away immediately. "Is there anything else you wish?" he asked. I answered, "Yes, I want my sister Marguerite." A strange look of remonstrance came into his face—it is a handsome face, and no man, with the exception of my father, has ever behaved to me with so much gentleness—as he said, "I will do everything in my power; my only concern is that you shall be happy." He asked me, then, if I could not be happy without my sister. Happy without you, Marguerite! My tears answered him. "Write," he said, "to Marguerite; do not conceal your thoughts; tell her that she is necessary to your happiness, and beg her to come to you at once." "You know where she is, then," I said; "there is no occasion to write. Let me go to her." He answered that he did not know where you were, or he would take me to you; that he would send a messenger with the letter to where he believed my master to be, and that the messenger himself should put his answer in my hands. He called a servant, and gave him instructions in my hearing, and

a few moments after my letter was written, I saw, from my window, the man galloping away. It is all so confusing that I do not know what to think.

* * * * *

“The woman has gone. She said some bitter, strange things to me before she left. She reproached me for having been the cause of her losing a good service, and said she knew well enough the reason why I wished to get rid of her. “You will live to repent it,” she said; “I would have protected you.” She was not allowed to say more, for one of Harold’s servants, coming in at the time, ordered her to be careful with her tongue. “My master is not to be trifled with,” said the servant. “I know it,” replied the woman; and turning to me said, with a sneering smile, “And so will you, my fine lady.”

“What did she mean when she said she would have protected me? Protect me from whom?

“Harold sent to know whether he might come and see me; he never visits me in my room without asking permission. I sent word back that he could come if he wished.

“ ‘His manners resemble those of my dear father; they are the manners of a polished gentleman. He is really one. “You will feel lonely,” he said, “without a companion of your own sex. Shall we find you one until Marguerite returns?” How grateful I was for his considerate attention! I accepted it gladly, and he then told me that a young woman was waiting for my approval. He went to the door and called her—a bright young creature—younger than I, whom I received gladly. Her name is Beatrice. “So now,” said Harold gaily, “we shall live happy ever afterwards.”

* * * * *

“ ‘A fortnight has passed since the man was sent with my letter to Marguerite. Daily have I asked Harold about him, and the only answer I receive is that he has not returned. Has Marguerite forgotten me? Had she sought me, surely she could have found me. There has been no secrecy in our movements. I find comfort in that reflection; we have travelled by the most frequented roads, and have stopped at the largest hotels. I have been entirely free. Harold said: “Child, if there

is any person you think you can trust better than you trust me, go to him; I shall not detain you, although I shall grieve to say good-bye. If you and Marguerite were together, you would not hesitate to accept me as your friend.” “No, indeed,” I replied, with regret that I should have caused him pain; “but then it would be different.” “Would it be really different?” he said. “But being alone, as you are, knowing no one, and without friends, is all the more reason why you should place faith in a gentleman of whom you could not ask a service he would not be eager to perform.” I cannot but believe him; indeed, situated as I am, I should be helpless without him.

“Reading over what I have written, my heart aches to find that in the last few lines I have thrown out a reproach against Marguerite. Forgive me, beloved sister! Too well do I know your truth, your faithfulness! That I should throw a doubt upon you reflects shame upon me. You could not forget me; nor can I you. Wherever you are, may happiness and peace of mind be yours! I pray for you day and night.

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“ ‘ At noon Beatrice brought me a message from Harold, requesting me to go to him ; his messenger had returned. I ran to him so quickly that I almost fainted from the rapid beating of my heart. Harold caught me in his arms, and held me till I recovered. From his face I knew that the news he had to tell me was bad news. “ Let me go,” I said faintly, “ and tell me the worst at once.” But when he released me I trembled so that I could scarcely stand ; Harold assisted me to a seat, and leant over me. I was almost afraid to speak, and my fears grew stronger with every moment of silence. “ Is Marguerite dead ? ” I whispered. “ We do not know that,” replied Harold ; “ all that we can learn is that the man you called your master has left the country, and has taken Marguerite with him. It is impossible to ascertain what part of the world they have gone to.” I seemed to hear in the air the words, “ Marguerite is lost to you ; you will never see her more ! ” Tears streamed from my eyes, and almost blinded me, and when I could see, Harold was kneeling at my feet. “ It breaks my

heart," he said, "to see you in such grief. What can I do to comfort you?" "Find Marguerite," I sobbed; "restore my sister to me." "If it is in man's power," he replied, "it shall be done. I swear it, by this kiss on your white hand!" I wiped the tears from my eyes and looked into his face; truth and honesty seemed to dwell there, but there was also an expression in it which brought blushes to my cheek. Ah, Marguerite! Would that you were here to counsel me! I am like a child groping in the dark, and I have no one in the world to depend upon but Harold.

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"Harold tells me he has sent three messengers in different directions to track my master, and he begs me in the meantime to be easier in my mind; in every possible way he strives to make the hours pass quickly. One thing he said which does not please me: "It is good sometimes to be able to forget." I asked him if he meant it would be good for me to forget Marguerite. He answered: "Heaven forbid; but that it were wiser not to allow our thoughts to dwell so constantly upon

one subject, if it gave us pain; and that we should not nurse our troubles." He said a great deal more to the same effect, but I can find no comfort in it.

" 'He entreated me to go out more, and it seemed so ungrateful in me to say No, again and again to everything he proposes, that I have consented to go to a theatre one evening this week. It is but a small thing to do in return for all his kindness.

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" 'I have just returned from the theatre. The moment we entered our hotel, I wished Harold good-night, and hurried to my room. Beatrice waited to help me undress; I said I did not require her assistance, and sent her to bed; her room is next to mine.

" 'In the evening a dressmaker brought two large boxes into my room, a present from Harold. She opened them, and laid out gloves, and shoes, and opera-cloak, and the most beautiful dress I ever beheld. It was altogether so sweet and attractive that I trembled to look at it, and longed to put it on, and at the same time felt as though my longing were a sin. When I

promised Harold to accompany him to the theatre, I did not think I should be compelled to dress so grandly. The dress-maker pointed out to me the beauties of the beautiful costume, the colours of which are what best become me. I asked her whether it would fit me, and she said that she had studied my figure, and that Beatrice had lent her a common dress of mine which had served as a guide. Time was flying, and Harold, I knew, would presently be waiting for me. I allowed the woman to dress me, and Beatrice, full of admiration, arranged my hair, and sighed over me in ecstasy. I thought of the times when you, my darling Marguerite, used to take pride in decorating me, and of your fond words and loving ways as you proceeded in your task. Ah! you loved your poor sister too well; you cared not for yourself. This was for Clarice; that was for Clarice; Marguerite wanted nothing—nothing but love! I gave you that, dear! but I can see now how selfish I was in comparison with you.

“ ‘ My thoughts were still dwelling upon you when Beatrice and the dressmaker

completed their task. I looked at myself in the glass.

“ ‘ I was almost ashamed of the pleasure I experienced, and felt as though my appearance were a wrong to you, dear Marguerite. But you would not have thought so ; you would have taken a greater pride in me than I did in myself. Why should I deceive myself or you ? I could not help feeling delighted, and the only thing I wanted in the world to make me completely happy was that you could see me, and kiss me, and whisper in my ear those sweet wishes for my future which I used to repeat to myself over and over again. My future ! what will it be like ? And yours, Marguerite ! What will yours be ?

“ ‘ It was time for me to go to Harold ; his eyes shone with delight when I presented myself. “ You are dressed in a befitting manner, Clarice,” he said ; “ you do me great honour.” And I had never seen Harold look so well.

“ ‘ It was to the opera-house we went. The theatre was crowded. It was wonderful. The dresses of the ladies, the lights, the animation of every person, who behaved as though there were no un-

happiness in the world, no misery, no poverty, no sorrow, no injustice. I did not think of this at the time; it comes into my head only now. I thought only of the bewildering, entrancing pictures around me.

“ ‘Harold and I were alone in the box, sitting in full view of the house. People stared at us from every part. “You are the prettiest flower in the bouquet,” Harold whispered, and bowed to this person and that, and asked me whether I had any objection to his receiving the visits of his friends. What objection could I have? The box was his, and I but a poor girl, almost like the heroine of the opera, a gypsy, whose dress at one time was as grand but not so pretty as mine. How beautifully she sang! And how the audience applauded her! Her voice was like a nightingale’s, but not sweeter than yours, Marguerite. Never, never was a voice as sweet as my dear sister Marguerite’s!

“ ‘I lost myself in the pleasure of the night; I felt as though I had drunk wine which intensified almost into pain the sense of enjoyment.

“ ‘ Many of Harold’s friends came into the box ; some of them are artists ; Harold himself is one, he says. He asked me in a whisper whether he should introduce me to his friends by my name, and I said No. I cannot tell why I did not wish it to be made common. He mentioned the names of his friends, but I did not distinctly hear one of them. They paid me a thousand compliments ; a queen could not have received greater attention.

“ ‘ The night passed quickly ; the curtain fell. Harold hurried me out of the box into the carriage. Beatrice was there with a lovely fur cloak which she fastened round my neck.

“ ‘ I leant back, and closed my eyes, and as we drove to the hotel Harold held my hand in his. I tried to withdraw it, but he would not let me. He hoped it had been a pleasant evening, he said ; I answered, Yes, and my voice seemed to die away in a whisper.

“ ‘ So now I have written all that passed ; I have done no wrong, and yet I am oppressed by a feeling of deep uneasiness. More than ever do I need your presence and your counsel, my dear sister ;

never more than now, never more than now !

“ ‘ Dare I write my thoughts ?

“ ‘ Suppose I ran away from this great hotel this very night, this very moment. In which direction should I fly ? Who would come forward and help me ? Do I not remember the night upon which Marguerite and I attempted to escape from our master ? Even Marguerite, strong and brave as she is, had to give up the attempt in despair. And I, weak and irresolute as I am, with no one to guide me—could I expect to succeed where Marguerite failed ?

“ ‘ Of what, then, am I afraid ? Do I fear Harold ? Would it be better that he should beat and starve me, than that he should strive by every means in his power to please and amuse me ? Then, indeed, if he were harsh to me, and made me feel my dependent position, I should have cause for tears ; but as it is, treated as a lady—Clarice, you are ungrateful.

“ ‘ Scattered about the room are the clothes and the flowers I have worn to-night. Marguerite, if she were to come in suddenly, would scarcely believe they were

mine; but she would be glad. It was what she always wished for me. Why, then, should I not be glad? I will go to bed now, and pray. All will be well in time—all *is* well! Father, that art in Heaven! my trust is in Thee! Good night, dear, dear Marguerite!

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“ ‘ I have been very uneasy in my mind. Until an hour ago I had not seen Harold for three days. He did not send me word or message. I asked Beatrice if she saw him, and Beatrice said, Yes, and that he always inquired after me? Did he not wish to see me? I asked; and Beatrice answered that he did not express the wish. Every day Beatrice and I have walked out, and no person has accosted or molested us. In the hotel I am waited upon by servants who obey my lightest word. This absolute liberty jarred upon me, and Harold’s avoidance of me made me uneasy. I sent Beatrice with a message to him, asking if he would see me; she returned immediately, and said that Harold was waiting for me. When I entered his study my resolution left me; I hardly knew what to say to him. Still I mustered courage to

ask if I had offended him. "Child," he answered, taking my hand; "it is I who feared I had offended you." "In what way?" I asked. "If you cannot tell," he answered, "I have been torturing myself unnecessarily. And we are really friends?" "Yes," I replied, but even as I spoke my voice deserted me again. Then he expressed his sorrow that he had been unable to obtain news of Marguerite, and that he feared it would take a longer time to find her than he expected. He spoke of other things, and I listened in silence; he said it was necessary that he should pay a visit to an estate a hundred miles away. "What will become of me?" I thought. It was almost as if he divined what was passing in my mind, for he said that he had been thinking of me, and considering what was best to be done. Near his estate, to attend to which would occupy some months of his time, was a pretty cottage which he said I could live in if I wished, with Beatrice and another servant or two; that if I accepted it would enable him to communicate to me without delay what news he might obtain of Marguerite. "It may happen," he said, "that one of my messengers will return

with Marguerite, and then, knowing where you were, I could bring her to you at once." The joy of this possibility caused me instantly to accept his offer, and I thanked him with tears in my eyes. "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" I asked. He held my two hands, and looked down into my face. "Clarice," he said, "you are never absent from my thoughts."

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"I have been in Harold's pretty cottage for a week. It is a most beautiful place, with a lovely garden around it; if Marguerite were with me, I could live happily here all my life.

"Everything was ready when we arrived; Harold must have seen to it beforehand. When I said as much to him he smiled, and said he hoped he had been able to please me. "You are queen here," he said. "Will you give me lodgment for the night?" "Indeed," I said, laughing, and much perplexed, "I know nothing of the place. It is yours." "Nay," he said, "I assure you it is your own, to rule in as you please, and although I do not know where to find a roof for my head this night, I will not stay unless you bid

me." Of course you may stay," I said; "but who will show me what to do?" "There is a housekeeper here," he said, and he called a woman by name, an elderly woman, who showed me over the house, and pointed out spare rooms, in one of which Harold could sleep. My bedroom is the sweetest I have ever slept in; it has windows on two sides, and is embosomed in a very bower of flowers.

"Harold left me the next morning, but came again in the evening to see how I was getting on. I was very excited, I had made so many discoveries during the day. There are stables and a little carriage, with a pair of ponies, and two saddle-horses. A groom explained that the ponies were for me to drive, and one of the saddle-horses was for me; the other was Harold's. Two gardeners were busy in the garden. At the end of the garden is a streamlet, and a pretty bridge over it leads into the woods. It is a fairy house. I cannot believe that it is mine, but Harold assures me repeatedly that it is so, and that if I like he will give me what he calls deeds. I told him I did not want them; that I was happy as I was. He caught at my

words. "And are you really happy at length?" he asked. Then, Marguerite, I thought of you, whom I reproach myself for forgetting sometimes, and I turned my head in sadness away.

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"Harold comes daily. Yesterday was Sunday, and he came early with a friend. Within a mile of this fairy cottage is a village church, and I was ready dressed for the morning service when Harold and his friend rode up. I told them I was going to church, and asked them to accompany me; they consented, laughing, saying they had had no such intention in their minds. We walked there, and our appearance excited the wonderment of the country people, who stared at us all through the service. Then, for the first time, I felt that a great change had come over me. When my father was alive, and afterwards, when Marguerite and I were travelling with our master from village to village, I knew that I belonged to the people. I belong to them no longer; that is plain from their bearing towards me. It pains me to think that a tie in which there was so much that was pleasant is broken. The

minister, an old man with white hair, paid no more attention to us than he did to the poorer members of his flock. We stood outside by the church door, observing the people who, when they left the church, wended their way homewards in different directions. The last to come out was the minister. He turned his benevolent eyes upon us. Harold and his friend bowed; he returned their salutation, and perceiving that they evinced a desire to enter into conversation with him, waited a little until they spoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TESTIMONY IN THE BIBLE (*continued*).

“ ‘In the sermon to which we had listened parallels had been drawn between the rich and poor, to the advantage of those who live in humble dwellings and work for their daily bread. It was upon this point that Harold and his friend conversed with the pastor, and drew from him his belief that not only was there greater happiness among the poor, but also higher virtues. It appeared to me as if Harold and his friend were amusing themselves in a light way at the pastor’s expense, but the kind old man showed no irritation or impatience; he listened attentively, and replied with dignity and gentleness. Until the discussion was at an end he did not address me; he allowed Harold to have the last word, and then turned his benevolent eyes upon my face. “Young lady,”

he said, and there was pity in his voice, "it pleased me to see you enter our simple church. Come often; you will find comfort in prayer; and if it should happen that you want a friend who will counsel you as a father would an erring child, seek me in my home. Any of the villagers will conduct you to it." As he spoke to me, he laid his hand upon my shoulder, with fatherly kindness, and while we were in this position a young girl very nearly of my own age approached him and stood by his side, calling him "grandfather." With a hasty motion he drew her from me, and with a bow walked away, leaning upon the young girl's arm. We looked after him till he was out of sight; he did not turn to look at us again.

"There was something in his action with respect to his granddaughter which deeply pained me. It was as though he imagined contact with us would do the young girl harm. And why should he have used the words to me, "who will counsel you as a father would an erring child"? I have done no wrong.

"Harold said he was one of a class of agitators who take pleasure in believing

that the rich are systematically corrupt and incapable of goodness. "But give these agitators money," said Harold, "raise their position, and they change their note. Then it is the poor who are vicious, idle, ungrateful. As they are. They serve us and rob us, and we pay them for service and robbery; the balance of virtue is on our side." Harold's friend laughed, and declared that no such balance could exist, because virtue was a myth. "What is right in one man is wrong in another," said this friend; "it really matters very little; it is all one in the end. When fruit lies within reach, where is the hand that will not pluck it?" I neither understood nor liked the conversation, and I was glad when the subject was changed.

"At times everything seems unreal to me. I had to play the hostess, which both gentlemen declared I did very prettily; I could scarcely believe it was I, Clarice, who occupied such a position. It has come about so strangely! It is as if I were in a boat without oars or rudder, drifting along a beautiful stream. For it is beautiful, very beautiful!

"In the evening we walked in the woods,

and Harold's friend disappeared. Harold and I were alone, and he spoke to me in tones so tender that I could scarcely find strength to reply. Ah, Marguerite! why do you not come, and take from my heart the weight that oppresses it? Why are you not here that I might whisper in your ear words I dare not write?

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“ ‘ Still no news of Marguerite. Harold has given me money for the pastor to distribute among his poor. “ Do not tell him,” said Harold, “ that it comes from me; he might think it would bring ill-luck with it.” “ Why?” I asked “ Why?” repeated Harold; “ because, dear child, I believe that in his judgment I am somewhat of a Mephistopheles.” The pastor thanked me when I gave him the money, and regarded me with pitying glances. It troubles me to see that look in his eyes; it is always there when we meet. I have tried to make friends with his grandchild, but he has prevented it. He has a kind nature. Why should he be so cruel to me?

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“ ‘ How delicious these summer nights

are! Life is very sweet. But one thing is needed to render it perfect—the companionship of my dear sister. “One day—one day,” says Harold; “it will come in time. Your sister lives, you tell me. I do not ask you how you know that she lives. It is enough that you say it; I believe it, as I believe everything that comes from your lips. So, one day, when you and Marguerite are together again, you will not have to tell her that you have been entirely unhappy.” Harold is wise, and tender, and true. He has not taken your place in my heart, dear Marguerite; no one could do that. But I should miss him sadly if he were to keep away from me now. I have no one else in the world to depend on—to trust in. I trust in him.

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“How long is it since I wrote last? Months—years—a lifetime! But time has passed quickly; the summer is gone, and it is now autumn. What has happened in these few months? So much, dear Marguerite, that I could not write it down if I tried. I am wrong; it is told in a few words. I am a happy woman—and Harold’s wife!

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“ ‘For many months I have not written a line of this heart-record. I have not forgotten you, sister; I have been in a happy dream.

“ ‘Marguerite, let me whisper a secret in your ear. Not to another, no, not to another soul in the world. It is yours and mine—and Harold’s. I shall soon become a mother.

“ ‘I am filled with wonder, and fear, and sweet delight. This cottage, in which I have passed so many happy months, is for ever sacred to me. My child will be born here.

“ ‘Now—now is the time that you should come to me, Marguerite! To share my joy, to take Harold’s hand in yours, and to say to him, “Thank you, brother, for your loving care of my dear Clarice!” To press my child in your arms—ah! how I tremble when I write the words, “My child!” My soul is shaken with a tempest of happiness. My child! My baby! What will she be like? I write “she,” for I know it will be a girl. What will she be like? I see her lying in your lap, Marguerite, with laughing

eyes looking into yours. And all your troubles are over, as mine have been, except as regards you, dear. Such pretty little hands—the little fingers are on my heart-strings now!—

“ ‘ Dear Lord of this sweet earth, make me grateful for the blessings Thou hast showered on my life, and let my little baby be like Marguerite? Grant that I may be spared to show my love to both these dear ones, and to Harold, who has behaved so nobly to me!

“ ‘ Ah, Marguerite, that he should love me, a poor girl! He so high, so faithful, and wise, and I so low, so ignorant, and inexperienced—is it not wonderful?

“ ‘ He will not be here to-night; he is absent on some great business. So presently, Marguerite, I shall turn down the lights, and bring you before me. I have often done so, and yearned to clasp you to my heart. I shall see you standing at a little distance from me, and I shall creep to your side, and place my shadow-baby in your arms. Shadows to-night, but soon to be real, thank God—soon to be real! Ah, Clarice! there lives not on earth a happier woman than you.

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“‘My baby is born. She is a week old, and I am strong enough to sit on the sofa, and write a few words slowly, to place with other confessions of mine in my old Bible.

“‘Being alone for a little while I have read over what I have written, and I am glad I had the resolution to continue my confessions—for so I will call them—from time to time. I should have forgotten so many things that Marguerite will like to read!

“‘My baby is asleep, her winsome face turned to mine. She is my life—dearer to me than my own, more precious to me than all else in the world. You will not be jealous, Marguerite. When you have a child of your own—which I pray you may have one day, dear sister—you will feel as I do that life contains no joy so sacred, so beautiful.

“‘From this moment summer is in my heart. I look at my baby in silent wonder and worship. How sweet is the air—how beautiful the world!

* * * *

“‘Harold is not with me so constantly

as he used to be. Affairs of importance keep him from me. When I chide him for his absence he says, "The world, child, the world! There are other duties besides love." He loves me. Is that not enough?

"And yet I torture myself. Baby is now six months old, and Harold should notice her more. "I prefer to notice you," he says to me; and then he kisses me and talks to me of the world. Is that a reason why men do not love children as women do? I asked Harold that question, and he answered carelessly: "It may be so. Clarice, be satisfied with things as they are. Do not make troubles; they come without invitation." "Trouble will never come to me," I said, looking fondly into his face, "while you are with me." He said nothing to this for quite a minute; he seemed to be thinking of the words. "While I am with you, child!" he then said; "is that to be for ever?" "Of course," I said, "for ever." He smiled and said, "Well, well, child, enjoy the sun while it shines."

"My heart is not entirely at rest. But I must not make troubles, as Harold says.

Perhaps it is because I expect too much. Marguerite has spoiled me. There never lived a human being so faithful and devoted as my dear sister.

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“ ‘A sorrowful cloud hangs over me, and I cannot shake it off. Have I brought it on myself? What sin, what crime have I committed that my life should be thus darkened ?

“ ‘Last Sunday I went to the village church accompanied by baby and my maid. On the way my maid told me that the pastor’s granddaughter was to be married during the week, and a desire to be present at the wedding took possession of me. For a long time the pastor and I have not spoken. It is painful to intrude when one feels one is not welcome, and, as the pastor always received me with constraint, I ceased to speak to him, contenting myself with bowing when I met him on my way to or from the church. He invariably returned my salutation with gentleness, and I sometimes looked attentively at him to see if he was angry with me ; but there was no anger in his eyes—only pity. But why should he pity me ? And why should

he be so careful that his grandchild and I should not be friends ?

““I waited at the church door till he came out ; he would have passed me had I not moved towards him, almost entreatingly. At some distance from us stood his grandchild and her lover, who, seeing the pastor stop to speak to me, would have come to us had he not, by a motion of his hand, restrained them. Slight as the action was, I understood it, and the tears rose in my eyes. “Sir,” I said, very humbly, “I have a great favour to ask of you, but you give me no encouragement. If you knew what pain you cause me, you would be kinder to me.” He answered, “I have no harsh thoughts for you, young lady. Ask what you wish ; if it is in my power, I will grant it.” “Your grandchild is to be married this week,” I said. “Yes,” he replied, “on Wednesday of this week.” “I hope,” I said, “that she will be very, very happy ! The favour I ask is that you will let me be present at the wedding feast.” He shook his head sadly, and said, “It cannot be ; it cannot, cannot be. We cannot receive you.” He did not move away ; seeing that I was deeply agitated

by his refusal, he remained at my side till I spoke again. "It is so hard to me," I said, scarcely able to speak for my tears, "that you refuse my friendship. I have done you no wrong; I am without father or brother or sister. We were like yourselves, poor people, working for a livelihood, and were not despised—indeed, we were not! By all but one person we were treated kindly, and were everywhere welcomed. My father is dead; my sister has been torn from me by treachery. I am young, sir, but I have been visited by great misfortune and suffering. That is not a crime; I should not be blamed for it. I have much to be grateful for, but there is something wanting in my life which should not be withheld from me when I beg for it." "There is something wanting in every person's life," replied the pastor, who appeared to be moved by my words; "no life is perfect. It would have been better for you had you remained always poor. I grieve for your misfortunes; you are young to have seen so much, to have suffered so much, but there is a path in which we must steadfastly walk if the esteem of mankind is to

be deservedly gained. That path is virtue. Better battle day and night with poverty, better endure the pangs of hunger, better die, than wander out of that path which leads direct to Heaven and happiness hereafter!" I could not grasp the meaning of his speech, it so dazed and bewildered me. "At least, sir," I said, "let me wish your grandchild joy, and press her hand once—but once, in friendship!" Again he shook his head. "Even this small thing," he said, "I, whose heart is overflowing with compassion for you, cannot permit to be done. It is my duty to protect those who have no knowledge of the world's sinful ways." With that he moved away, and I walked sorrowfully home.

"In what way have I sinned? "It would have been better for me had I remained always poor!" Does my sin lie at Harold's door, because he is rich? I remember what Harold said of this pastor and of the animosity of his class to those who were higher in worldly station than themselves. Can it be that? No, there is a hidden meaning in the pastor's behaviour to me—a hidden, terrible

meaning which no one can explain but Harold. I dare not think—I must wait till Harold comes.

“‘Oh, baby, baby! A little while ago we were so happy! And now——

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“‘After three weeks’ absence Harold came to-day. He remained with me but a few hours. I am in despair. Let me endeavour to write what passed between us.

“‘I related to him the conversation I had with the pastor. He listened in silence, never once interrupting me, nor assisting me when I hesitated. His manner was cold and ungracious; I was frightened; I asked him if I had done wrong. “Very wrong,” he replied; “why do you seek the friendship of such a man or of people in his station?” “There is no other church near,” I said timidly; “in God’s house all are equal.” “Is that one of the pastor’s platitudes?” asked Harold. “I have heard my father say so,” I answered, “and it came into my mind.” “There is no such thing as equality,” said Harold, “inside or outside church or any other walls. Some are born to rule, some to

obey, and all must fill their stations becomingly. Let the worthy pastor keep to his; I keep to mine. For you, Clarice, you must choose between us, it seems. Well, that is your affair."

"Marguerite, at that moment I was animated by your spirit; a strange courage possessed me. "Harold," I said, "do you no longer love me?" "What a question!" he cried; "of course I love you. But I will not be crossed. Clarice, nothing vexes me more than unnecessary annoyance—unless it is being asked for explanations. When a lady in whom I am interested sets me up against another person, or sets up another person against me, I must confess to feeling wearied. Life was made for enjoyment." "You would not wish," I said, "that I should be despised." "Why put yourself in the way of being despised?" he said. My courage did not desert me. "Harold," I said, "you must yield to me in this. The pastor's words to me implied that I was not worthy of the friendship of his grandchild, for a reason which I should blush to explain." "I shall not know the reason unless you do explain it, Clarice," he said, biting his lip. "He thinks me

unworthy," I said in a tone of shame, "of the friendship of a pure and innocent girl. It is a humiliation. Harold. The pastor is a good man; give me the means of setting myself right in his eyes." "How can I do that?" asked Harold. "I have no record of our marriage," I said, and was about to proceed when I was stopped by an expression in Harold's face I had never seen there before. "You are aware, Clarice," he said, without any display of anger, although I felt he was exercising control over his feelings, "that there were obstacles in the way of our being married in church." "Yes, Harold," I said, "you told me so." "It was sufficient for you then," he continued; "it should be sufficient for you now. Ours was a civil marriage, privately contracted. Were it in my power—which it is not—to place in your hands what you require, I should decline to do so. I will not have my private affairs exposed to the gaze of strangers. You should be satisfied that I have behaved towards you like a gentleman? If, from some cause outside myself or my actions, you choose to doubt me, I cannot help it; nor shall I take any steps

to disabuse your mind of suspicion. Your course is before you, Clarice; be wise, and choose the right one. You are young and beautiful; you have both sense and discretion; continue to trust me, and all will be well. Nothing is to be gained, I assure you, if you act in opposition to my wishes. You can see how you have annoyed me: I am ashamed to present myself to you in any but an entirely agreeable guise. Pardon me, I beg. Never renew this subject; it will be injudicious. I will see you again soon, when this little cloud has passed away."

"He left me, and the cloud remains. It will never pass away! It will hang over my life until I draw my last breath!

* * * * *

"Confirmation of my fears has come too soon—too soon! I am not fit to touch the hand of a pure and innocent girl.

"In a lane near to the cottage in which I live I saw a beggar-woman. She held out her hand; I had no money to give; my purse was empty. She raised her face to mine. It was the face of the woman who was given to me as a companion on

the day I lost Marguerite, and whom Harold discharged because I disliked her. The moment she recognized me she placed herself before me defiantly. "Oh, my lady," said the woman, "this is where you live! A pretty hiding-place! It has lasted longer than I expected; you must have managed the great man cunningly. How did you manage it? Tell me. Though I'm too old and ugly to profit by the lesson. Are you together still, or have you replaced him by another?" I attempted to pass her, but she would not allow me. "You were the cause of my losing a good service," she cried; "I don't love you for that. You have been the cause of my wanting food; I don't love you for that. Had it not been for you, I should never have hungered for bread." "I am sorry," I said, and knew not what more to say. The woman's grudge against me was justified, if what she said was true; and it seemed to be so, for want was in her face. "It is convenient to be sorry when it is too late," she said. "But it is too late for you as well as for me. Your master—" I interrupted her, and demanded to know of whom she was speaking.

“Of your master,” she repeated. “He would have paid me well but for you; he would have rewarded me finely, for he is rich and generous, when he has his way. To please you he sent me packing with the barest pittance, and since then not a morsel of good luck has fallen to my share. All your fault, my lady. I set it down to your account. Have you found him out yet, as others have done before you?” “If you are speaking of my husband,” I said, “he will punish you for your wicked words.” She laughed loudly. “Husband!” she cried; “only one lady has ever had the right to call him by that name, and the lady is not you, my pretty one! You had better have kept me with you; I could have shown you what sort of stuff such gentlemen’s hearts are made of!—” I stopped to hear no more. Strong as she was, she could not prevent me from escaping, and I flew back to my room, with the horrible words she had uttered burning before me in the air.

“‘They are true, I feel they are true! Harold’s manner towards me in our last interview proves their truth. And this very morning I received a letter from him

—in the fewest words—telling me he was afraid he would not be able to come and see me for many weeks. That means he will not come again.

“ ‘The pastor was right. It was his duty, he said, to protect those who have no knowledge of the world’s sinful ways. I had such knowledge. Oh, yes! I, the guilty Clarice, had such knowledge, and to associate with me is to be defiled!

“ ‘Oh, Thou all-powerful Lord before whom I shall appear on the Judgment Day, teach me and direct my faltering steps! Whither shall I fly? To whom shall I turn? Marguerite! Marguerite! come to me, and let me hide my shame upon your faithful bosom!

“ ‘Fly! I dare not. I must live and face the world. Harold shall do me justice. For the sake of my child, my pretty, innocent child, he shall do me justice. I will go to him, with my child in my arms—

“ ‘Come, my dear one. We will start to-night, this very night. You smile at me, now; one day you will be ashamed to look into my face. When you know the truth you will shrink from the unhappy girl who presses her lips to yours, who

kisses your pretty fingers, whose tears stain your sweet face!—

“‘If at this moment we both could die! Oh, Marguerite, Marguerite, pity and forgive me!’

CHAPTER IX.

RANF PUTS THE LINKS OF THE CHAIN
TOGETHER.

“THOSE were the last words which were written in the Bible, and they wrung my heart with the force of an uttered cry. Had the unhappy girl stood before me, appealing for justice, she could not more deeply have impressed me than did this silent testimony of her betrayal.

“Justice she can never obtain. Revenge may come. Through me? Perhaps. The strange chance which has placed her confession in my hands is but part of a design yet to be completed.

“It is not chance ; it is destiny.

“After reading the confession, persons and events swarmed in my mind in almost inextricable confusion. Gradually they reduced themselves to something like order. What are the conclusions plainly to be

drawn from this tangle of deceit and treachery ?

“ That Harold and Mauvain are villains ? It is no new discovery. From the first I have formed a just estimate of the character of these gentlemen.

“ Best to call them gentlemen. Men with a true sense and appreciation of manhood do not systematically betray innocence. Chivalry is not utterly extinct. But men are scarce ; gentlemen abound.

“ Leontine, my dog, you are to be envied. Better to be a faithful hound than a human being who lives for the pleasure of the hour and cares not who suffers.

“ It is really a question which is the higher animal, man or beast.

“ What did this scornful sculptor say to Mauvain ? ‘ Nature throws our sins at our doors, and wise men make haste to bury them.’ And again : ‘ The true philosophy of life is the pursuit of pleasure.’ Then, indeed, life is a bestial gift, and all that is fair most foul.

“ Aye, Harold, you were right when you said that Nature throws our sins at our doors. You may live to prove your words. And I, the hunchback, may open the grave

in which you have made haste to bury your cowardly crime. Your haste was premature. Your crime lives, and it may happen that the hour will come when its beauty shall pierce your heart and cause you unutterable pain. Trust me to direct it to that end. So strangely do things come about ! In your wildest dreams you could not have imagined that on this lonely snow-clad mount (nearer to heaven than you will ever be) the flight of a hawk after my white dove, thirsting for its innocent blood, should be the means of bringing your villainy to light.

“Clarice and the lady who sought refuge in my mother’s hut on the night of the storm are one. By what process of reasoning do I arrive at this conclusion ? Unless the point is definitely fixed, all the circumstances which surround it, in which strange fortune has made me a principal agent, vanish into air.

“Fair in its promise was Clarice’s life ; most unhappy in its fulfilment. The confession in the Bible proves it ; the words of sorrow that fell from the lady’s lips in my mother’s hut prove it. Clarice had a child ; the lady, also—a child who was

torn from her, as her sister was. As Clarice's sister, Marguerite, was torn from her. The lady's father was dead at the time the confession was written. Thus, there is as yet no conflicting line in the history of these two lives.

“By what means was Clarice's sister torn from her? By treachery. It was a plot planned with skill and cunning; a plot to which I have no clue. And there must have been another hand in it—a hand at present hidden from me. Patience, Ranf, patience; all will be made clear to you in time.

“Between these sisters existed a devoted love. More perfect on Marguerite's side than Clarice's, for in Marguerite's breast beat the stronger heart; she was the guide, the protector. Clarice was a child; Marguerite a woman.

“Hapless Marguerite! Faithful sister! Had fate led you to Clarice in the hour of her delusive dream, your honest glance would have pierced its hollowness. Had fate led you to her in the hour of her anguish, you would have vindicated her honour and exposed the knave who had betrayed her. I can see Harold shrinking

from the indignant looks and words of Marguerite, whom his smooth tongue is powerless to deceive; I can see him turning away, humiliated at the exposure of the trick which destroyed the happiness of an innocent young life.

“By what means was Clarice’s child torn from her? By death? No. She lives, and her name is Evangeline.

“In my mother’s hut, upon my return from my wanderings, I found the Bible in which Clarice’s confession was concealed. All evidence points to the presumption that Evangeline is Clarice’s child. In what manner my mother obtained possession of the child and the Bible time may never disclose. Death has placed its seal upon this mystery.

“Conjecture here must find a place; there shall be as few blank spaces in the picture as possible.

“Harold should do her justice, Clarice declared. It was a cry of despair forced from her suffering soul—an appeal which, in the fruit it should bear, was utterly, utterly hopeless.

“Her grief, her shame, were not for the eyes of those who had attended her in the

pretty cage provided for her by her lover. Alone, she, with her child, would traverse the weary road. She crept from the cottage at night, with no thought or knowledge of the difficulties in her way. She suffered—do I not know what she suffered? I, a strong man, inured to hardship, meeting it with scorn, could not avoid the smart of the world's cruelty; how much less Clarice, a weak girl, frightened of shadows, and as poor perhaps as I when she set out on her journey? By her side walked a phantom which all men and women could see, proclaiming her degradation. Near her journey's end her strength gave way, and it was at this point of her career that my mother came across her, and learnt, mayhap, from her fevered lips the story of her shame. What purpose my mother had in her mind when she stole the child it is impossible for me to say. But it appears to me certain that upon Clarice's recovery from her illness she was told that her child was dead.

“Then, childless and heart-broken, she found Harold, and with him Mauvain. She was received with tenderness, for the fatal reason that her child was dead. It

is almost incredible that there are in the world men who rejoice in the death of a child.

“I remember when, at Mauvain’s request, Harold accompanied me to see the child I claimed as my own that, when his eyes fell upon Evangeline, his face grew as white as death. Did any suspicion present itself to his mind? If it did, he deemed it convenient to set it aside. Awkward complications might arise from such a resurrection in the life of a man who made pleasure the be-all and end-all of his life. ‘A man’s mind,’ he said to me on the ship which conveyed us to the Silver Isle, ‘is a prison-house; there are cells in it whose doors we keep tightly closed until some momentous event forces them open, and lets in the light we dread.’

“Had my mother known as much as I, she would have added the name of Harold to those of Mauvain, Ranf, and Evangeline written in the Bible. She may have had a motive in suppressing it; she was a cunning woman; she knew whom to truckle to, whom it paid best to serve.

“An important link has yet to be sup-

plied, and the only person in the Silver Isle who can furnish it is Margaret Sylvester. The resemblance between these two women grows stronger to my mind the longer I dwell upon it. I will speak to Margaret Sylvester. I shall not disclose the secret to her, for the present at least. I have reason to be suspicious of all mankind, and were another human being to share my secret, it might be the means of estranging Evangeline from me. I must be cautious, therefore, and learning what I wish to learn, shall keep my own counsel.

“Many of Harold’s words recur to me with strange significance. ‘I love a woman passionately; another man steps between us and makes me suffer.’ Did Mauvain step between him and Clarice? Again: ‘No man knows what is before him; and although I shall part from you and our little maid with no definite idea of ever meeting you again, it may happen that our lines of life may strangely cross in the future.’ Spoke like a fatalist. Secure in this isle you left the living proof of love’s treachery. A safe hiding-place. When you returned to the woman you betrayed,

you breathed more freely. Though Clarice believed her child to be dead, chance might have brought them face to face. It may happen that this task is left to me to perform. Then, gentleman Harold, upon whose side will be the advantage?

“I feel stronger and better. To-morrow I shall be able to walk to the lower huts, and to the house—Mauvain’s house—in which Evangeline has found a home.

* * * * *

“It was good to get out again into the fresh air. My birds and goats and dogs had missed me. My dogs leapt upon me and kissed me; my goats rubbed their heads against my legs; my birds came at my call.

“I set the huts in order, and accompanied by Leontine made my way to the stretch of wood that lies in the rear of the house occupied by Margaret Sylvester. There I gave voice to my signal for Evangeline, the song of the lark. Evangeline answered it almost immediately.

“She is growing more beautiful every day, and not less affectionate. It is a week since I saw her, and she was full of a story which she related to me with eagerness.

It concerned Joseph Sylvester, Margaret's son.

"These children and Gabrielle are companions, and there is something in the lad's manner which has attracted me to him. His face is frank and honest, and his eyes do not seek the ground when I look at him. I have spoken but a few words to him, and a little while since, upon Evangeline's prompting, I expressed a liking for the lad. She informed him of this, and thereupon an incident occurred which Evangeline was eager to relate to me.

"Evangeline, girl-like, asked Joseph for a proof of his fondness for her; she had no thought of anything serious, but Joseph accepted the question in that light, and laying his left hand upon a stone struck it with all his force with a stout branch, and sorely wounded it.

"'It was wicked of me,' said Evangeline; 'I drove him to it. I asked him to strike as hard as he could, to show me how much he loved me. He struck his hand at once, and it was covered with blood. It must hurt him now, although it was a week ago.'

“ ‘It was a brave action,’ I said; ‘if Joseph would do as much for you when he is a man—’

“ ‘He will,’ quickly interrupted Evangeline; ‘he said he would like to die for me; but there would be no good in his doing that.’

“ ‘Unless it were to defend you from an enemy,’ I said.

“ ‘An enemy,’ exclaimed Evangeline; ‘why should I have an enemy?’

“ ‘You have none on this isle, I am sure.’

“ ‘Oh, no,’ she cried, ‘here everybody loves me, and I know no one else. See—Joseph is there.’

“ ‘I called the lad to me, and spoke words of praise to him for the pain he had inflicted on himself.

“ ‘It was nothing,’ he said; ‘Evangeline makes out that it was a wonderful thing. I would do more than that, without thinking of it.’

“ ‘He did not speak with bravado; there was a modest firmness in his voice rare in a lad so young.

“ ‘Shall we strike up a friendship, Joseph?’ I asked.

“His eyes sparkled, and Evangeline pressed my hand.

“‘I should like to,’ replied Joseph.

“‘Let it be so, then,’ I said; ‘you and I are friends from this day forth. But if people speak against me—how, then?’

“‘I will not believe them,’ said Joseph.

“‘Examine me well, Joseph; see how crooked I am—unlike every other man in the isle.’

“‘I like you all the better for it,’ he said, without hesitation.

“‘But my face, my lad. Even in a picture you never saw a queerer face than mine. Think twice; I am not a man to be trifled with. It would be dangerous to give me friendship, and withdraw it through caprice. If you pledge yourself, I shall hold you to your pledge.’

“‘I don’t know,’ said Joseph, with a look in his eyes which denoted that he was studying what I said, ‘whether I understand you or not; but I should be proud of your friendship, and if you give it to me, I will stand up for you and be true to you.’

“‘Oh, then; people speak against me?’

“‘Yes.’

“ ‘And think it a strange thing that Evangeline should love me ?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘And invent stories of my life on the snow mountain, and say it is best to have nothing to do with such a man as I ?’

“ ‘Something like that.’

“ ‘And in spite of all, you wish to be my friend.’

“ ‘Yes, if you will let me.’

“ ‘You must have a reason. Let me know it.’

“ ‘Evangeline loves you ; I love what she loves.’

“ ‘Give me your hand.’ He offered me his wounded hand, and I pressed it ; he did not wince. ‘Evangeline is the link between us. It is for her sake I do what I have never done before in my life.’

“ I heard Evangeline murmur, ‘I am glad, I am glad !’

“ ‘And now, Joseph,’ I said, ‘our compact being made, let your mother know I wish to speak with her.’

“ Presently the children were gone, and Margaret Sylvester stood before me. The moment she saw me she divined what had escaped the children’s notice.

“ ‘You have been ill,’ she said.

“ ‘I was moved by the sympathy expressed in her voice.

“ ‘I met with an accident,’ I said, ‘and am thankful to have escaped with life. I should have been sorry, if it is given to us to rejoice and suffer in another state of being, for I do not want to lose my hold of life till certain things are accomplished.’

“ ‘The days are peaceful here,’ she said, with a sigh ; ‘life flows on calmly. During the years I have lived on this isle I have had no sorrows but those which ordinarily fall to the lot of men and women. One should be happy here.’

“ ‘You are surely so, Margaret Sylvester. With husband and children who love you, surrounded by plenty, attended by respect and affection, what more can a woman desire?’

“ ‘You are right,’ she replied ; ‘I ought to thank God day and night, upon my knees, for a lot so free from care. What was the nature of your accident?’

“ ‘I saw a flower on the mountain top ; it shone like gold, and I wished to obtain it. That it was out of my reach strengthened my wish, as is usual with

human creatures. Attempting to pluck the flower, I lost my foothold, and fell over the precipice. Saved by the branch of a tree which I caught as I rolled down, I managed to crawl to my hut. To such a man as I a few bruises are of small account.'

"While I spoke I was attentively observing her; the resemblance between her and Clarice was unmistakable, although Clarice was formed on a more delicate mould.

" 'Your life is a lonely one,' said Margaret; 'why do you not come among us and strive to win the love of the islanders?'

" 'Too late,' I replied; 'I have no desire for companionship. With my dogs, and birds, and goats, I am perhaps as happy as I deserve to be. There is something on my mind, mistress. It concerns Evangeline.'

" 'What have you to say about her? You will not take her from me?'

" 'I have no such thought. That wild mountain is well enough for me, but it is not a fit place for a flower so tender as Evangeline. Yet, mistress, I believe I have only to say to her, Come, and she

would obey me without question. Content yourself. I am satisfied with the home in which she is growing to womanhood ; I am satisfied with your care of her. But I am curious to know why, when we first came to this isle, you were so anxious to receive her. Why, with children of your own, did you beg that Evangeline should be given into your charge ?’

“ ‘I need make no secret of it,’ said Margaret, with a wistful look ; ‘she reminded me of one whom I loved.’

“ ‘Who was dear to you ?’

“ ‘Very, very dear !’ she replied, with emotion.

“ ‘If you remember,’ I said, ‘on the night I first saw you here I remarked that you were unlike the other women on the isle.’

“ ‘I remember.’

“ ‘You told me you were not born on the isle, and I asked you to step into the light so that I could see you clearly. But for that inspection it is likely that I should not have consented to allow Evangeline to remain with you.’

“ Her curiosity was aroused.

“ ‘What was there in me that satisfied you I was a woman to be trusted ?’

“ ‘Why, mistress, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to me that I had seen you elsewhere—in the old world, where the days were not so peaceful, and where life did not flow as calmly as in this Silver Isle. Here, said I to myself, is a woman who has seen trouble, and knows when quicksands are close by; a woman who has been through the fire, and has come out pure. To such a woman I may safely entrust Evangeline.’

“ ‘My words affected her powerfully, and it was a little while before she mustered strength to speak.

“ ‘You have seen me elsewhere, you say. It is so long since I have spoken of the old life that the mere mention of it causes me pain. You have seen me in the old world! Was I alone?’

“ ‘No, mistress; you had with you a girl younger than yourself, who looked like your sister. I heard her name mentioned. If I am not mistaken, it was Clarice.’

“ ‘Tears flowed down her face as I spoke these words.

“ ‘It is true,’ she sobbed, and turned away.

“ ‘I did not intrude upon her grief. The link was supplied, and the chain is complete.

CHAPTER X.

THE STATUE IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

“ I RE-OPEN my diary. I am in a land of wonders.

“ Two years have elapsed since my conversation with Margaret Sylvester, when I believed I had completed the chain which surrounds the lives of Evangeline, Margaret, Clarice, and Harold. But much was hidden from me which I had no expectation would ever be disclosed. I had then no intention of continuing this record; but events have occurred, and a discovery I have made (which shall in its proper place be set down) is in its nature and possibilities so startling, that I shall find relief in imparting my secrets to a companion to whom I can talk, and in whom I can confide with unreserved confidence. These white pages will not betray me.

“ The friendship sealed between Joseph

Sylvester and myself has endured. He is growing into manhood, and those qualities for which I gave him credit as a lad—such as faithfulness and determination of purpose—have developed in strength; they are part of his nature. He is not too free with his tongue—a decided merit. Loquacity is ever dangerous. I have given him tasks to perform, have walked in the woods with him, and have studied his character. He is not a blind follower; he has opinions of his own. There is but one person whom he would blindly obey—Evangeline. His will is subordinate to her lightest whim. It would be a cruel test were she, in a moment of waywardness, to call upon him for a foolhardy proof of love; he would give it without remonstrance. He is weak only where Evangeline is concerned; it will be well for both if she uses her power with tenderness and wisdom.

“My white doves fly now between valley and mountain. Evangeline calls them her white angels. The idea was mine, and the children entered into it with delight. A pigeon-house was built on the roof of Margaret Sylvester’s dwelling, and Joseph and I had no difficulty in training the

pigeons to fly to and fro. Thus the children and I are in constant communication, and many a weary hour has been beguiled by watching the pretty messengers conveying messages of love under their wings to those who are dear to me. Threads of love between valley and mountain, invisible air-lines stretching from heart to heart.

“From the top of my mountain I can see far over the sea, and my message sometimes runs, ‘A ship is making for the Silver Isle.’ The news is conveyed to the inhabitants of the isle, and in this way I am enabled to render them a small service. It occurs to me occasionally that I owe them that which I can never repay. This Silver Isle is theirs, and they have allowed me to live here in peace. That the service is rendered in the name of Mauvain does not lessen the obligation. True, they did not receive me with open arms, but I had no right to expect it. In no other part of the world could I have lived my life free and untrammelled, at liberty to come and go, and surrounded by peace and plenty, I thank them for it from my heart. Churl that I am, it would be difficult for me to express my thanks in spoken words.

I lack the generous impulse ; my nature has been warped.

“The children call me ‘the Master of the Mountain.’ A little while after my pigeons had been taught their duty, I received the following message, in Joseph Sylvester’s handwriting,—

“ ‘Evangeline’s love, and Gabrielle’s, and Joseph’s, to Ranf, their friend. Grandfather Matthew wishes to see the Master of the Mountain. He will be at its foot an hour before sunrise to-morrow.’

“At the hour named I was at the appointed place, and found Matthew Sylvester awaiting me.

“If Joseph’s good qualities are inherited from his grandfather, then is Matthew Sylvester a man to be trusted. Sincerity and honesty of purpose are depicted in his face ; it is not a mask to hide the secret thought. He and his son Paul are cunning fishermen. They have a boat for deep-sea fishing, and I often watch it from the heights when it is far out at sea.

“Matthew Sylvester came straight to the point.

“ ‘I wish to speak with you,’ he said,

‘about my daughter Margaret, and her sister Clarice.’

“‘At Margaret Sylvester’s desire?’ I asked.

“‘No,’ he replied; ‘of my own prompting.’

“‘I am ready to listen,’ I said.

“‘And to deal frankly with me?’

“‘That is as it may be,’ I said. ‘A man must judge for himself how far it is prudent to speak openly.’

“‘There is no danger with me,’ he rejoined. ‘In what passes between us now we shall be travelling the same road—the road which leads to the happiness and peace of mind of those we love.’

“‘Admitting as much,’ I said guardedly, ‘even that we have the same goal in view, it may happen that we have cross purposes to serve. Then, discovering that our interests are conflicting, we should not be slow to take advantage of words uttered in such a conversation as this. Remember, it is not of my seeking.’

“‘True,’ he said, with a smile of much sweetness; ‘but is it necessary always to dive beneath the surface in search of suspicious motives?’

“ ‘A man must be guided by his experiences ; I am guided by mine.’

“ ‘You have no reason to mistrust me?’

“ ‘No more reason than I have to trust you.’

“ In adopting this tone I was not meeting Matthew Sylvester in the spirit in which he approached me ; but Evangeline was concerned in all that concerned Margaret and Clarice, and I preferred to err rather on the side of caution than of frankness. His next words put me to shame.

“ ‘I am unreasonable,’ he said gently ; ‘it was not to be expected that you should open your heart to a stranger simply for the asking. Even if I held out the hand of friendship to you, I could not expect you to accept it without questioning my motive. The fault is on my side ; if I desired your friendship I should have sought it earlier. I come to you now on behalf of my daughter Margaret, who is very dear to me, and I shall be plain and truthful with you, concealing nothing. I take it that you and I stand upon equal ground ; we have seen the world and served our time, and care but little for ourselves. We have found our species forgetful of favours,

ready to vilify, eager to condemn. It is said that old age is selfish ; naturally ; but it is not so selfish as youth. The young are forgetful ; the old remember. Entranced by the light and fresh beauty of life, the young think only of themselves, of their own joys and sorrows and ambitions. They live to learn, as we have lived to learn ; in the meantime let us, who have fought and been wounded in the fight, endeavour to protect our children from unnecessary sorrow.'

"There was a singular fascination in Matthew Sylvester's manner, and I inwardly resolved to meet him in a franker spirit ; but neither to him nor to any man will I yet disclose the heart of my secret respecting Evangeline. He continued,—

"Those are happiest to whom knowledge comes late ; they have more time to enjoy. But some taste the bitterness of life in their springtime. My daughter Margaret was one of these. When life should have been fairest for her it was darkened by a sorrow which exists at this hour, although many years have passed since it was inflicted. This sorrow is associated with her sister Clarice, whose name you only of all the inhabitants of this isle have uttered in

her hearing. She has dwelt upon the circumstance with the tenacity of a very tenacious and constant nature, and she believes you had a reason for speaking to her about her sister.'

" 'I had a reason,' I replied. 'It was partly to confirm a suspicion that was in my mind.'

" 'Partly,' repeated Matthew Sylvester, with a quickness which showed how deeply he himself was interested ; ' then it was not wholly your purpose ?'

" 'No, it was not wholly my purpose.'

" 'A woman who is in the habit of brooding over a subject in which her affections are involved has strange fancies. You have been in our market-place, and seen the statue there.'

" 'Yes.'

" 'It is the statue of that Evangeline whose tragic death occurred on the mountain upon which you dwell. Margaret, when she first beheld the statue fancied it resembled her sister Clarice. But that, of course, is impossible.'

"I repeated his words mechanically, 'That, of course, is impossible:' but my thoughts belied them.

“ ‘Is the name of the sculptor known?’
I asked.

“ ‘No,’ replied Matthew Sylvester, ‘and the story goes that when, at the instance of the captain of a brig which traded to this isle, the commission was given, the likeness of one of our fairest maids was handed to him as a model for the sculptor to work upon; and that, when the statue was delivered and set up in the market-place it was seen that the sculptor had worked from a model of his own.’

“ ‘The story is new to me,’ I said; ‘I cannot see the connection between the statue and Clarice.’

“ ‘Does it, to your mind, bear any resemblance to Margaret’s sister?’

“ ‘I saw her but once, and I have paid no particular attention to the statue.’

“ ‘You have led a life of adventure, I understand. You must have some sympathy with the life led by Margaret and Clarice—led, also, by myself and my son. I sometimes think of the old days with a strange yearning, hard as they were! When you met Clarice, Margaret was with her.’

“ ‘No; Clarice was alone. I admit that

I was not truthful when I told Margaret Sylvester that I had seen her in the company of her sister. Moreover, I do not know even now what kind of life the sisters led.'

" 'They were dancers, singers, performers in small comedies, wandering from village to village, playing to humble folk who gave them honest welcome. While their father lived, their life was a happy one, but when he died'—Matthew Sylvester made a sudden pause, and with a quick changing of his theme asked, 'If Margaret was not with her sister when you met her, and you were not acquainted with their occupation, how did you know the girl you saw was Clarice?'

" 'The question almost took me off my guard, and I answered slowly, 'From evidence not to be doubted.'

" 'Matthew Sylvester looked at me wistfully. 'I must not press you too hardly; I have no right to demand a clearer explanation. You are aware that Clarice is dead.'

" 'I started, and the movement did not escape his notice.

" ' 'When did you learn this?' I asked. 'Lately?'

“ ‘No—many years ago.’

“ ‘Since you have been on the Silver Isle?’

“ ‘No,’ he said, ‘I learnt it in the old land, before Margaret and my son were married.’

“ These words opened a new chapter in the mystery which enveloped the life of Clarice. It was but a short time before I, with Evangeline and Harold, set sail for the Silver Isle that I had given shelter to Clarice in my mother’s hut and was witness of her grief. I was now as anxious to hear what it was in Matthew Sylvester’s power to impart to me as he was to hear what I could impart to him, and at my request he related to me the story of the lives of Margaret and Clarice. It deeply moved me. He told me of the love existing between the sisters, of the passionate devotion of Margaret for Clarice, of their happy days while their father lived, of his dying and leaving them in the power of a man who used them cruelly, of Margaret’s protection of Clarice, of the last night the sisters saw each other, and the strange impressions left upon Margaret’s mind when she and Clarice fell asleep in the room

in which their master was gambling with two gentlemen (in one of whom I saw Harold as plainly as if he stood before me), of Margaret's terror in the morning when she awoke and found her sister gone, of the pursuit of Clarice and its failure, of Margaret's agony when the news flashed upon her that she and Clarice had been betrayed, of her keeping with her master, enduring misery and want, and travelling with him in the hope that one day she would find her sister, of the gradual fading of her hope, of the meeting in the woods of Margaret and Matthew Sylvester, of her release from tyranny and suffering, of the news of Clarice's death furnished for a consideration by the man who had torn the sisters from each other's arms, and lastly of the marriage of Margaret and Matthew's son, and their departure for the Silver Isle.

“ This story, related in simple language by Matthew Sylvester, made everything clear to me ; nothing was wanting to complete the villainy of the plot. Clarice had been deliberately sold and deliberately bought, and the sisters had been taken opposite roads on false promises, and

separated from each other so effectually that nothing short of a miracle could have brought them together again. My respect for Margaret was strengthened, as was my detestation for Harold; and I vowed inwardly that if the opportunity ever offered itself, I would avenge the wrongs of the sisters without mercy or pity.

“In return for the confidence Matthew Sylvester had reposed in me I imparted to him something of my own life in the forest owned by Mauvain, of the storm, and the appeal for shelter by a lady and her servant, and of my learning the following day that the lady’s name was Clarice. I recalled the conversation that took place between the servant and myself—a conversation which, if words had meaning, defined in unmistakable terms Clarice’s social position. I said nothing of Evangeline, nor of Clarice’s lament for the child she had lost.

“‘Describe the lady to me,’ said Matthew.

“I did so, faithfully, and his remarks left no doubt upon my mind (but truly there was room for none, all the parts of the story fitting so exactly) that the lady was

indeed Clarice, Margaret's unfortunate sister.

“‘One point still remains,’ said Matthew; ‘the date of the meeting between you and this lady.’

“‘I fixed the date by my arrival on the Silver Isle, and Matthew Sylvester's face became indescribably sad.

“‘We were deceived,’ he said; ‘Clarice lived—perhaps lives—a life of shame.’ He paused before he spoke again. ‘Thus do we lose our faith in goodness! Were Margaret's faith in her sister's purity to be shaken, I can imagine no grief more terrible than hers would be. The very name of Clarice is to her an emblem of purity.’

“‘Then arose within me, in vindication of the unfortunate girl, the true history of her betrayal, known only to me and her and Harold, as related in her confession in the Bible, and I felt that it would be a stain upon my manhood if I did not speak in her behalf.

“‘Listen,’ I said, ‘and do not question me as to the means by which I obtained my knowledge. Clarice is innocent. What is pure is pure; no laws formed by

man, from motives of policy or convenience, can affect the immutable. There are principles of right and wrong which results cannot twist or modify by the breadth of a hair. That what is clear in supreme judgment is not clear in man's should matter little to any human being whose mind is not the slave of convenient custom. When cunning and innocence meet, and innocence is betrayed, I know at which door lies the guilt, and, if there be a higher than earthly justice, which will be adjudged the sinner and which the saint.'

" 'How shall we convey comfort to Marguerite,' said Matthew, 'when she learns the story of her sister's shame?'

" 'Let her never learn it,' I replied. 'Let her rest in the belief that Clarice is dead. It is best so. Do not convey a new unhappiness to one who has already had more than her share of suffering.'

" So it was agreed between us, and we parted.

" Within a week of this interview I walked at midnight into the great market-place of the isle, and waited for the moon to rise. Not a sound disturbed the stillness ;

the land was in darkness; the islanders were at rest. It was as though a dead world lay in the arms of an eternal night.

“I stood before the statue of Evangeline, unable, in the deep gloom which prevailed, to discern the features or the moulding of the limbs. I fancied I saw a figure move in the darkness; I advanced towards it, and it glided away. I believed it to be a creation of the dark clouds which moved slowly across the sky, and I determined not to yield to the mental jugglery. In due time the moon arose, and the white statue of Evangeline stood out in the clear light, a work of transcendant beauty. The raised hand, in the act of listening, the inclined head, the smile on its lips, were life-like. Different as was the aspect under which I had seen Clarice in my mother’s hut—in the life expressive of despair, in the stone expressive of gladness—I recognized the likeness. It was Clarice. Harold had done his work well. A great artist—and a villain !

“Yet in admiration I gazed upon the perfect work, representing a maid who two centuries ago had been led to death by love’s betrayal. Had any other than

Harold been the sculptor, I could have kissed the naked feet and worshipped the hand that shaped them.

“ Suddenly I heard a voice.

“ ‘ She lives ! ’

“ Who spoke ? Spirit or mortal ?

“ Mortal—and she stood by my side, a woman, with a weird smile on a face that once was beautiful, that was beautiful now even in its ghastliness, with the pallid light of the moon shining on it.

“ She was fantastically dressed in patches of colour ; flowers were in her hair ; her eyes were blue and wandering ; her hands were never still.

“ Had a spirit appeared to me I should have been less surprised.

“ ‘ She lives ! ’ repeated the woman, ‘ I thought only I knew it, but you are in the secret. Are you a man ? You don’t look like it. When the people are about, she is dead ; when they sleep, she lives. See—we are alike.’

“ She put out a white and bleeding foot, and seeing blood-marks on the earth, stooped and wiped them up with her dress. It may be that I gave her a pitying look, for she said, still smiling,—

“‘It does not hurt. There are worse pains. My baby is dead. I will show you her grave.’

“Her hand grasped mine, and without force I could not have released it.

“‘Good-night,’ she said to the statue; ‘I will come again.’

“Unresistingly I allowed her to lead me the way she wished to go, and on the road she talked to the trees, and the fields, and the clouds, which were now gathering and obscuring the light. We walked for fully a mile, and when it was quite dark she said,—

“‘Is it a sin to love?’

“‘No.’ I had no other answer to give.

“‘You are not a man,’ she retorted, ‘for you do not answer as others do. It is a sin to love, and I have loved and sinned. So they say. If my baby had lived I should not have cared; I should have laughed in their faces. Hush! I hear her crying!’

“The wind was wailing. A storm was rising.

“‘Come quickly. She is crying because I have been away from her so long!’

“I had no heart to gainsay her, and she

led me into a desolate valley, some distance from the houses of the islanders, and stopped before a little mound of earth covered with wild flowers.

“ ‘They would not bury her with the others,’ she said, kneeling by the grave. ‘I was glad. I have her all to myself. Hush, darling! Mother is with you!’

“ She took no further notice of me, and I, not knowing what else to do, left her by her baby’s grave, which she kissed and talked to as if on it lay her baby’s upturned face.

“ So. Even in this peaceful isle sin and shame and love, and love’s betrayal, find their way into human life. Thus will it ever be in lands where mortals live and die.

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS DISCOVERY.

“I WAS not likely soon to forget this singular adventure, to which perhaps I attached an undue importance because of its connection with the statue of Evangeline; but there was another reason for remembrance in the parallel which suggested itself between my new acquaintance and Clarice. I paid a second visit to the market-place at midnight, and again met the woman, who, through love, was as much an outcast among the islanders as myself. She claimed me as a friend, and again asked me to accompany her to the grave of her child. I humoured her, being curious to learn the particulars of her story, but she did not gratify my curiosity until we met for the third time in the same place.

“‘I asked her,’ said Bertha, pointing

to the statue, 'whether it was right for me to meet you here and talk to you ; she said I could trust you. Tell me your name.'

" ' Ranf.'

" ' Mine is Bertha.'

" That night she told me her story. There was nothing new in it, so far as regarded herself. She trusted and was deceived, and the man who brought disgrace upon her was killed in open fight by her father.

" ' My mother was dead,' said Bertha, ' and my father turned me from his house. He had no other children ; he might have been kinder to me. But he was a man who always acted rightly, so the islanders said. Then it is right never to forgive. I had friends, as I thought—girls, and men, and children. Not one of them had a heart, not one ! Is it not strange to go through the world so—to kiss and embrace you, and then to thrust you away ? And for a father to turn from his child ! I do not understand it. Why, if my baby lived, and grew to be a woman, and did wrong unconsciously, or was unhappy in any way, in disgrace with all the world, I

should take her to my bosom and comfort her, and whisper to her, "Do not grieve, my child; your mother loves you, though all the world is against you!" And we should be happy again; it would not then be always night; there would be sometimes a bright cloud in our lives.'

"I allowed her to talk without interruption, and presently she spoke again of her lover.

"'I knew that my father was seeking him; I had been told so, not out of kindness, but out of malice. "There will be blood shed," they said; and they looked upon me with horror, as though the crime were mine. I tried to find him and warn him. All the day and far into the night I wandered from place to place, seeking him, and at length I saw him lying dead upon the ground. It drove me almost mad. I ran to my father's house; I beat my hands against the door till the blood came; he opened a window above, and asked me what I wanted. "There has been murder done!" I cried. "The guilty has been punished," my father said sternly, and he bade me go from his house and never dare to set eyes on him again, for he no longer

had a daughter. I was overwhelmed, and sat down on the door-step, in the dread hope that the world was coming to an end. And all the while my baby was in my arms, sleeping peacefully, and as I looked at her sweet face in the dim light, I thought, "What does it matter? We have each other." I took her to her father, and put her lips to his cold face. I kissed him also, for the last time, and have never seen him since. I do not know where they have buried him; they would not tell me.'

"We were walking to the grave of her child, and she stopped and looked around with wandering eyes, seeking the shadow of the man she had loved too well.

" 'I was alone in the world,' she said, as we walked onward again, 'no one to speak to, except my baby; no one to love, except my baby. Every one had fallen off from me, every one; only my baby remained. Then it happened that I came in the night to the market-place, and discovered what no other person in the isle but you and I suspect—that what they call a statue lives and speaks. When she first smiled upon me it was like rain upon

a parched field. My eyes had been scorched and dried up with grief; ah, what pain! what anguish! And when Evangeline smiled, the tears came and relieved my heart. She spoke to me, and comforted me, and prevented me from going mad. We are sisters, and by-and-by we shall know each other better in the spirit-land, where I shall have my baby again in my arms. And my father will be there, and baby's father, too. Will my father, when he sees me there, say, "Come to me, my daughter; all is forgiven"? What if I answered him, "Had you been merciful to me, my baby might have lived, and I should not have been condemned to wander night after night and day after day from valley to valley, from field to field, with a bleeding heart, which one kind word from you would have relieved." Then, if there be justice, the priests will be dumb. What do they mean when they say, "God is love"? There should be something more than words, should there not? "God is love." Then He will know I have done no wrong, and He will take my little one to His bosom, and me, from whom she drew life. I shall wait—I shall

wait—and on the judgment-day I shall say to the priests, “You told me that God is love, and you tried to prove to me that He is hate.” Yes, it is true. They thrust fire into my wounds. Would you believe that they would not bury my innocent baby in consecrated ground? But a soul is a soul, and they could not rob her of that, nor me of Divine love and mercy. So I am satisfied to wait, but not too long—not too long! I must die before I grow old. Look at me; I am pretty; I don’t want to grow ugly, and then die. Baby might not know me, and that would be too terrible to bear. Where do you live?’

“‘On the mountain.’

“She looked at me, and retreated a few steps, impelled by some instinct of repugnance; but she came quickly to my side again, and took my hand.

“‘And your name is Ranf, you told me. I did not think at the time. You are the being I have heard of and was warned against, and never saw till the other night. That proves what men are. Let me whisper to you. There are people here who abhor you, and yet you are the only one who has

given me a kind word since my baby died.' She kissed my hand passionately. 'And you live on the mountain—Evangeline's mountain. She lies, too, in ground that has not been consecrated. I shall come and see you on the mountain.'

" 'You will be the first who has dared.'

" 'Oh, I shall dare!'

" 'Best to keep away,' I said; 'I prefer to live alone.'

" 'The mountain is free; I shall come; I am not frightened. Evangeline is there, and her heavenly messengers!'

" I repeated, in wonder, 'Her heavenly messengers!'

" 'The pretty birds that fly to and fro. I have watched them, and hope one day they will bring me a message from Heaven or Evangeline. You see, I know you do not live alone. Have you not goats and dogs?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'It must be a fine life. I shall come and see you.'

" I left her, as on the first night, whispering to the wild flowers which grow on her child's grave, and kissing the cold earth which mercifully hides what is dearest to her in this world and the next.

“ Her piteous story drew me to her, and from that night we were friends. A fancy of mine impelled me to place some roots of the dream-flower on the grave of her child, and when I told her the name of the flower she thanked me earnestly, and said that Heaven had directed me to bring the sweet comfort to her soul.

“ What is most beautiful in her is her devotion to her dead baby. As the leaf loves the light so does she love her child. In the mouldering clay of her child shines a star.

“ Her father lives now a life of seclusion, pitied and not condemned by his comrades. And yet he has broken a holy commandment. It is hard to thread one’s way through these labyrinths—not for me, for others; my mind is no longer in a state of doubt upon other than mortal matters. The woman who most needs pity receives none; she is shunned and avoided by all. Hard as granite are the islanders in their notions of morality.

“ I have already set down here how, when I slipped over the precipice and almost met my death, I was saved by the branch of a tree which grew out of the

rocks, and how, by this means, I discovered a path which led me to a place of safety, from whence I crawled to my hut and nursed my wounds. I determined then, when I was strong, to convince myself whether this path was made by Nature or man. If by man, but one man could have formed it—the Cain of the Silver Isle, who in a paroxysm of jealous love treacherously killed his brother.

“I set forth from my hut, accompanied by my dog Leontine. I strapped a blanket round my shoulders in case I should be benighted, and I provided myself with food, and a gourd for water. A light axe, a pick, and a short-handled shovel, completed my equipments.

“It was not without difficulty that I found the narrow path which led to the outer surface of the rocks. The circumstance that for some distance it had been tunnelled had escaped my memory. Since I last passed through the tunnel a quantity of loose earth had fallen; this I cleared away, and in the course of the afternoon, after much labour, I emerged from the tunnel into open daylight. From the mouth of the tunnel the path stretched

onwards for about twenty yards, and there terminated—of necessity, for the sheer surface of the rock was reached. I recognized the tree whose stout branches had preserved me from being cut to pieces on the jutting stones, and tired with my exertions, I sat down, with my face to the sea, and partook of the food I had brought, Leontine sharing with me. The meal being over, I lay full length on a flat surface of rock, and with my arm round Leontine's neck, uttered my thoughts aloud. The dog listened to me with an appearance of sagacity, and at the same time with a watchful eye for my safety. I had chosen a perilous resting-place; an enemy creeping up behind me might with a light push have sent me rolling to the bottom of the cliffs; but no enemy was near, and my hand was steady, my eye true, and my mind clear. I could not help smiling at the thought of what might occur were Harold, Mauvain, and I imprisoned on this spot, with old grudges to satisfy, and holding each other in bitter contempt.

“ ‘It would be a rare test of courage,’ I said aloud. ‘If something most precious

depended upon life or death, how then, Leontine? There is truth in wine, they say. So when a man's soul is racked and tempest-tossed, his true nature is revealed. The many rave and threaten; the few endure, and smile at fate.'

"Autumn flowers grew everywhere around me; various-coloured grasses waved in the breath of light breezes; insects with gossamer wings threw fairy shadows over the velvet moss which carpeted the trunk of the ancient tree. Nature is bounteous in her gifts, and clothes the loneliest spots with beauty.

"'Impossible to say,' I mused, when, after a contemplation of these eternal miracles my thoughts returned to my project, 'at this distance of time whether the road we have traversed was formed by Nature or man. If by man, there must have been a purpose in view. It is scarcely probable it was undertaken to arrive at this barren result. Certainly there is from this point a very fine prospect, and one can enjoy it without fear of observation on the part of the islanders; but that is not a great advantage, for the prospect is equally fine from the top of the mountain. What

discovery might one make in this lonely spot, more secluded even than our mountain huts? I might split open an ancient rock and release a toad, who would not thank me for bringing it into the light; or a spirit might guide us by a safe road to the mysterious depth in which Evangeline and her bridegroom found their grave. Her story is a true epitome of life; one day smiling and happy, the next imbedded in a grief which death alone can kill. Leontine's eyes are fixed on that beetle whose burnished scales reflect gorgeous colours of green and gold and purple. A handsome fellow, Leontine, beyond the painter's art. How lovely is the sea, with the sunlight playing on it! An ocean of living jewels! It stretches to shores I have trodden in pain and weariness. A bitter world lies beyond these seas; but for the matter of that there is bitterness enough within this girdle of silvery ripples. There is a taint in our blood, my dog; we fret and faint with desire; we lay our heavy hand upon the weak, and hold them down while they suffer—in proof of our own righteousness, Leontine. What have you found, dumb friend? A treasure?

“Leontine was busily scratching the earth from a spot nearer even to the edge of the precipice than the rock on which I lay, and presently she came to my side, and in a way I understood, besought my assistance. I shifted to the spot which had interested her, and saw that she had scratched the earth from what looked like a piece of rusty iron. At first I regarded it with no interest, but suddenly it flashed upon me that if it was iron which Leontine had partly laid bare, it was an evidence of man’s work. The moment this occurred to me I started to my feet and dug my pick into the rock to complete the discovery ; the consequence was that I almost lost my balance, there was so little room to swing the arm with freedom. The danger escaped, I proceeded with greater caution, and loosening the rock and earth around and above the metal, saw that it was part of a chain which must have lain buried for many scores of years. My journey was not destined to be fruitless ; man had been here before me.

“My interest being now thoroughly awakened, I went to work with a will. Link by link I forced from the rock a

chain at least sixty feet in length, and coming to the last link found that it was fixed to an iron ring which was firmly imbedded in the rock. With all my strength I strove to detach the ring, but could not move it. Had I succeeded I should have placed a difficulty in my own way; for was it not likely that the chain was an important step in the discovery of a secret which had been hidden from human knowledge for generations?

“It had been no light task to fix it so firmly in the rock; it was a serious work, seriously performed, with a distinct and definite motive.

“As I considered, playing with the coils of the chain with my foot, it slipped over the rock with a startling crash, and hung sheer down. Quickly I tested whether it would bear the weight of a man. There was no doubt of it. It would bear the weight of two such men as I. Without further thought I grasped it firmly, and commenced to descend. That there was danger in what I was doing did not occur to me; I was, indeed, animated by a spirit of exhilaration. I remember now, and shall remember to the last hour of my life, the

expression in Leontine's face as I looked up and saw her peering down upon me. The expression was almost human in its intense sympathy with my exploit, and as I descended, looking upwards at my dog, with the sky flying from me into illimitable heights, I exulted in the thought that there was one creature in the world who would be faithful to me to the death. I had but to call 'Leontine!' and she would leap into the void without fear at the sound of my voice. She would meet her certain death. Well, a faithful death ranks next to a faithful life. And man and beast can die but once. It is but a question of a little time; the day will be sure to come when there will be no to-morrow.

CHAPTER XII.

GOLDEN CAVES.

“I HAD committed myself to a perilous enterprise. The links of the rusty chain rasped the skin off the palms of my hands, and I had need of all my strength to preserve my hold. Had I not found here and there a resting-place for my feet in the jutting rocks, and had I not been inured to danger, I should not be alive now to make this record.

“I reached the end of the chain, and, with a sense of great relief, I saw beneath me an opening in the face of the precipice. The chain was just long enough to enable me to swing myself into this harbour of safety—a comparatively easy task because of the trees which grew in its mouth. Utterly exhausted, I sank upon the ground, and allowed myself time to recover my breath, which had been almost spent by my exertions and excitement. Then I

surveyed the position in which I found myself.

“The place in which I was sheltered was a cave formed by Nature. From the heights above its mouth could not be seen, and even outwards from the sea it was scarcely possible it could be distinguished, in consequence of its being thousands of feet higher than the water level. No light came from within; the cave was in deep darkness. I listened a moment; a mournful wail floated to my ears. It was Leontine, calling for her master; I did not answer her. It afforded me satisfaction to think that I had left on the rocks above some portion of the food I had brought with me from my hut, for I knew that Leontine would await my return.

“The afternoon was already far advanced, but I was determined not to abandon the adventure, at least until another sun had risen. Too much time would be lost in returning now to my hut; and indeed I felt that I had need of rest before I attempted to climb the rocks by the aid of the chain. In a couple of hours the sun would set; the night would be dark, but there was nothing to fear. My

blanket was strapped round my shoulders, and I had sufficient food for the next twenty-four hours. I had also the means of obtaining light, and was thus well prepared for present emergency.

“ So deep was the darkness in the cave, that I struck a light before I made a move inwards. For some little distance the roof was man-high; the path was encumbered with loose stones and brushwood, but these I easily cleared away, and stepping forward cautiously, and making sure of my ground to avoid a possible pitfall, I soon succeeded in penetrating so far into the cave that the light of day was entirely shut out. The walls of this natural tunnel were dry and free from slime, and when my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I derived assistance from the varying densities of shade, which almost served the purposes of colour. Slowly I made my way onwards, meeting with no obstacle to my progress which I was not able to surmount.

“ It was a strange journey. The profound stillness, the knowledge that I was hidden in the very bowels of the earth, and that I was treading a path which, if it had been trodden by mortal, had not been trodden

for centuries, the fancies which thronged my brain and the grotesque shapes which grew out of the darkness—these, coupled with the uncertainty of the result, filled me with exultation ; and even when I heard a faint sound for which I could not account, I had no feeling of fear. I paused occasionally and listened, in the endeavour to discover its nature and the direction from which it proceeded. But the tunnel was of eccentric form, winding now this way, now that, with abrupt turns which I was compelled to follow, and the sound seemed to proceed now from one direction, now from another, and now to cease altogether. At one time it resembled the singing of birds, at another the rustling of leaves ; the impressions it produced were always pleasant and agreeable.

“ I lost count of time ; I could not tell whether I had walked, and crept, and crawled for an hour, or two, or twelve. I was certain of but one thing—that the path I was treading led downwards, and that every step I took brought me nearer to the sea level. Sometimes the path was very steep, and taxed my strength severely, but I was equal to every difficulty, and con-

tinued my adventurous journey without hurt. Monotony was destroyed by an exhilarating sense of danger.

“After a time I began to make discoveries. A short distance before me I saw a reflection of bright colour, and when I reached it I found that it proceeded from without. There was a cleft in the rock, and through this opening I beheld the rays of the setting sun. The space was not wide enough for the body of a man, and I stood at the narrow window, and drank in the fresh air, and watched the colour die out of the western sky. Before me stretched a vast expanse of cloud and water, and both for a little while were luminous with light; then gradually crept on the darkness of night, and the solemn ocean lay beneath and beyond, enveloped in mysterious shadow. At that moment I was imbued with a truer sense of the mighty grandeur of Nature and of the insignificance of man. Unceasingly, unerringly move the silent forces of Nature, majestic and invincible, heedless of pigmy mortals. In set forms of speech I have never prayed; but at fitting moments my soul has breathed its prayer, and this was one. So I stood

at the narrow window in the rock, and thought my prayer of worship, and wonder, and gratitude. Isolated as I was from sight or companionship of human creatures I was not alone. The heavens and the sea were with me.

“Intending to be up with the sun, I unstrapped my blanket, and wrapping it round me, lay down and slept. The soft, mysterious sound ran through my dreams, and created fancies which did not disturb my rest.

“Early in the morning I was astir, strong and refreshed; and then to my delight I discovered that I was not to continue my journey in utter darkness. Light came through other clefts in the rocks. Downward and ever downward I pursued my way, and at noon, as near as I could judge, the nature of the sound which had accompanied me for so many hours was revealed to me. It was a waterfall from the topmost height, creeping and rushing down the moss-clad range—here boldly leaping into space from jutting rock, here broken into a hundred rivulets, here united again, and beautifying the air with spray and foam which caught rare colour from

sun and moon, and ran with it, laughing, to the sea. I filled my gourd with the water, and drank; it was sweet and fresh. Shortly afterwards my progress was suddenly arrested, and I could proceed no farther. A chasm stopped my way, and I had no means of descending it. The danger of attempting it without ropes was too great. I had no option but to retrace my steps, and I did so with the determination to return with such appliances as were necessary to prosecute my discovery to the end. As I anticipated, Leontine was waiting for me, and her delight, when she saw me climbing up to her by means of the chain, was unbounded. It was midnight before we reached my hut.

“Many weeks were occupied in getting together the articles that were required. I had to obtain them from the islanders, and I proceeded with caution, so that they should have no suspicion of the task I was engaged upon. During the interval I twice descended the chain, and devoted time to the clearing away of the loose stones and brushwood which somewhat impeded my progress; and the labour of descending

and ascending was so great, and caused me such pain, that I made a ladder of ropes and slung it over the rocks by the side of the chain.

“I was compelled to take Joseph Sylvester partly into my confidence. He and his people being out fishing, saw from the sea a figure climb the face of the precipice. The distance was too great for them to distinguish my form, and they agreed not to mention the subject to the islanders until I was spoken to concerning it.

“‘No person but you lives on the mountain,’ said Joseph Sylvester to me, having sought me for the purpose of conversing with me upon the subject.

“‘No,’ I replied, ‘only I.’

“‘Last night we were out fishing,’ said the lad, ‘and we saw a figure creeping down the mountain. My grandfather did not know whether it was man or animal.’

“‘Did you see,’ I asked, ‘by what means this man or animal was effecting the descent. It is no small thing to do; one false step would be fatal.’

“‘That it was that made us wonder,’ said Joseph. ‘We saw nothing but the

figure creeping down, and then suddenly it vanished in the darkness.'

" 'You have not spoken of it to others, Joseph.'

" 'No,' said the lad; 'Grandfather Matthew thought it might be you, and that you might not wish it to be known.'

" 'It was I, Joseph, and I do not wish it to be known to others than yourselves.'

" 'You may be sure we will not mention it, then; but it is a strange thing to do.'

" 'Do I not live a strange life?' I asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'Then it is natural I should do strange things. The mountain and I are friends. No one knows it so well as I. Generations ago a dark and terrible deed was committed on that mountain, and the bodies of those involved in it lie unburied in unknown depths. Say that it is a whim of mine to find their bones, and give them burial.'

" 'Is that really your purpose?' asked Joseph, his clear eyes looking into mine.

" 'Press me not too closely, Joseph; set it down to that, and let it content you. One day, perhaps, you will learn all my secrets, but you must not seek to know

what I wish to conceal. Rely upon this; what I do is done with good intent.'

"With that I changed the subject, and I have reason to believe that the Sylvesters have complied with my wish. Nevertheless, from that time I have chosen dark nights for my descent.

"At length everything was prepared, and having so arranged that I could be absent from my hut for a week, or longer if necessary, I set out with the intention of completing my discovery. I had previously conveyed a quantity of food to the spot where my course had been arrested; ropes, chains, and tools were also there, so that I had but little to burden myself with. I had taken other precautions as well.

"It occurred to me that I might meet with an accident which might prevent my return; in plainer words, I might meet my death. In that event, there were certain things I wished done.

"I sent a message by one of my pigeons to Evangeline, and told her to meet me at the foot of the mountain. She met me there. I had my dog Leontine with me. I told Evangeline that I had work to do which would prevent me from coming to

the valleys, and even from communicating with her, for fourteen days.

“ ‘You have never seen one of my huts,’ I said ; ‘would you be afraid to ascend the mountain with me?’ ”

“ She laughed at the idea, and with an eagerness which showed how she had longed for the opportunity, took my hand, and said she would come at once.

“ I conducted her to my lower hut, where I had collected all my animals and birds, and I asked her if she would visit the hut every three days, to see that they wanted nothing. She gave a delighted consent.

“ ‘May Joseph come with me?’ she asked.

“ I answered No, not in the performance of this task ; he might accompany her to the foot of the mountain, and wait for her there.

“ ‘But,’ I continued, ‘if at the end of fourteen days, you do not hear from me, let Joseph accompany you to my hut at the top of the mountain. There you will find a sealed book which you will give to Margaret Sylvester. She will know what to do with it.’ ”

“Evangeline gazed at me with a look of alarm.

“‘You are not going to leave us?’ she said.

“‘You would be sorry to lose me, Evangeline?’ I asked.

“Her eyes filled with tears, and I hastened to reassure her.

“‘There is nothing to fear,’ I said; ‘you have but to follow my instructions, and all will be well. You would not wish that I should choose another in whom to place my fullest confidence?’

“‘No, indeed,’ she replied, with a little sob.

“‘That is why I have spoken to you, and I tell you again there is nothing to fear. I love only you; next to you, Joseph. You see, my dear, I want to try you. You are growing, Evangeline; to-morrow you will be a woman.’

“‘To-morrow!’ she exclaimed.

“‘Why,’ I said gaily, ‘of course to-morrow, which means in a little while. So to-morrow you will be a beautiful woman, and I shall live to take pride in you, and to help your happiness in many ways. It is but fair, my dear; you have

helped me in my darkest hours. No, there is nothing to fear; only do this that I ask you.'

" 'Yes,' she said; 'I will do it.'

" 'Here,' said I, 'take this smooth branch, and cut in it a notch every morning, commencing with to-morrow. Before you cut the fourteenth notch, which will mean fourteen days, you shall hear from me. You are looking at Leontine; shall I give her to you?'

" 'Oh,' she said, 'it is too much.'

" 'Nothing is too much from me to you. I would give you my life if it would help you. I give you Leontine; she is yours. You will find her faithful, but not more faithful than her master.' I stooped and kissed the dog. 'Call her,' I said.

" Evangeline stepped a few paces away, and called 'Leontine.'

" The dog looked into my face wistfully; I nodded, and pointed to Evangeline, and the faithful animal went at once and stood by the side of Evangeline, and licked her hand. Tears were in Leontine's eyes. It was a dog's sacrifice; man could not have performed and endured it more nobly.

" So, all being arranged, I set out for the

final attempt. I started at night, and by noon of the following day I reached the mouth of the chasm. The remaining portion of the day was occupied in fastening the ropes by which I intended to make the descent. It was only a matter of time; no other difficulty presented itself. Then, after a few hours' rest, I lowered food and water (learning in this way the depth of the chasm), and grasping the rope, carefully felt my way to surface-ground. It was more easily accomplished than I expected. I stood upon solid rock, and, looking upwards, fancied I could see a dim rift of light at the very top of the mountain. In that case the range, from top to bottom, was hollowed out by nature. At that moment it was not a matter of importance to convince myself whether this was really so, and I applied myself to what was of more interest to me. Having reached the depth of the chasm, was there an outlet downwards? Yes, and not difficult to find—a road, circuitous and eccentric, leading direct to the sea-shore.

No smooth velvet sands met my eyes, but a scene as wild as I had ever gazed upon. The shore-line was dotted with

caves into which the sea rushed with tremendous force. The waves, broken by hidden rocks, seethed and hissed against the ancient walls, and reared their foaming crests in anger; and as they receded to the calmer haven which lay beyond the treacherous rocks, the water poured in torrents from every crag and basin, and sped swiftly after the retreating seas. Then there was peace, and the caves glistened with diamond spray, lit up with rainbow colour; but in a few moments the waves rolled inwards, to renew the eternal conflict, and the air was filled with fury and wild confusion. At the mouth of one of the largest of the caves were huge masses of sea-weed, clinging to the rocks with such tenacity as to resist successfully the tremendous onslaught of the waves; and as the sea attacked their thick brown belts and bands, they curled and writhed and gasped, liked a myriad tawny serpents fighting desperately for life in the embrace of a merciless enemy.

“Grand and terrible as was the scene, it did not present itself to me on this occasion, in its grandest and most terrible aspect, for the tide was running out. It

was fortunate for me, as in two or three hours I hoped to be able to reach the lower shore ; at present it was impossible to do so, and I could do nothing but wait.

“In the meantime I was not idle ; there was food enough for eyes and mind. The contrast between the fury of the sea within the caves and its peacefulness a short distance beyond the line of hidden rocks was wonderful. Doubtless those who were acquainted with the sea which surrounded the Silver Isle were well aware of the danger of this shore-line, and were careful not to approach it. No boat could live in the turmoil of these waters ; a moment or two would suffice to dash it into fragments. Small chance, therefore, for human life, which, in such a struggle, must be drawn inevitably to its swift destruction.

“Firmly fixed in the rocks, at a distance of thirty or forty feet, was an object which attracted my attention. It was in the form of a huge Cross, and seemed to be fashioned of wood. Weed, and moss, and shell-fish encrusted it ; the action of the water had worn it into holes here and there, but it was not rotted.

“How ran the legend of Evangeline and the brothers? The man who had played the part of Cain had, in his remorse, cut an enormous pine-tree into the shape of a Cross, and had carved upon it the figure of the Saviour. This work, which occupied him for twenty years, he intended to set up on the highest crown of the mountain of snow, as a warning to sinners and an appeal for mercy. He was not permitted to complete his work of expiation. At the supreme moment, when the last finishing touch had been given to the labour of a lifetime, he and his symbol, in the midst of a fearful storm, were hurled from the heights. The islanders declare that it was a divine judgment upon him. That might be; what interested me most was that there was truth in the bare details of the story, and that its confirmation lay beneath me.

“The man’s death was swift and terrible and merciful, and doubtless his bones were swept out to sea—a fitting resting-place.

“I watched the waves recede inch by inch, and when I deemed it safe to do so, I descended the sharp rocks, and stood on

the lower floor of the cave. Tempting pools lay here and there, and I bathed in one and renewed my strength, thinking with exultation that I was the first living man whose foot had ever touched this shore. Not only the cave which held the work of a sinner's repentance, but a hundred others, were left in peace by the retreating sea, and the rocks upon which the gigantic sea-weed grew were also left in peace to recover from the fever of the struggle for life.

“My first task was to examine the Cross and the Figure carved upon it. Even at this distance of time, and worn and overlaid as it was, I saw that it was a grand work, and could have been executed by no man weak in mind or body.

“The Cross had fallen into its natural position, and stood upright.

“The points of the rocks glistened with light; the shore was strewn with shells of great beauty. Colour and form were here in rare perfection.

“So full of novelty was the position in which I found myself that for a time I paid no attention to a particular colour which in calmer moments would have

drawn and fixed my attention. Looking at it idly, and with no suspicion in my mind, I saw that it was of bright yellow, and I judged it to be sand of the sea of a richer colour than that which lay on the shore. But presently I noticed that, except in particular spots, there was no trace of this brighter colour, and that it presented itself only in crevices of the rocks, into which it had been thrown by the action of the sea. I took a pinch of it in my hand, and to my surprise, discovered that it was of infinitely greater weight than ordinary sea-sand, that it was of irregular formation (again unlike the sand of the sea), and that it was of metallic substance.

“A metal, then. What metal?”

“Gold!”

“The idea, flashing suddenly upon me, staggered me for a while. I could not grasp its full meaning.

“How could this precious metal have found its way into this strange and unlikely region?”

“I laughed at myself for the question, and looking around, as though for an answer, it seemed to me that Nature

was deriding me for my ignorance and presumption.

“In itself, gold was of less value in the Great Scheme than almost any of the other objects by which I was surrounded—the life which crept and crawled, and lived only for a day, and then died. In their life, flowers beautify; in their death, they fertilize. Weeds, rank things of the earth, repellent insects, all have their uses; but gold is gold, and remains always the same.

“That man should have made it of exceptional value is of small account. Why should not gold be found in the Silver Isle? Silver was found here, and Mauvain was the first discoverer. Mauvain discovered silver. Why should not Ranf discover gold?

“The islanders might think little of it, might even be displeased at the discovery. Golden grain, in their eyes, was infinitely more precious—the grain that waves in cornfields, that glistens in the eye of the sun, that whispers of plenty, or rather of Enough, and contentment—that was the grain which ministered to their happiness and which they valued most. But not to all is given such wisdom. In this isle

the gold around me was valueless, mayhap. But elsewhere?

“I was bewildered at the prospect held out by the discovery. It was mine; not another should share it with me. Power, fame, the adulation of men, the smiles of beautiful women, the pleasures of the world in every intoxicating form, were mine. They were here, in my grasp. I could purchase them, and enjoy them, and, if I cared, revenge myself upon those who had inflicted misery upon me.

“Such were the ideas which first passed through my mind when I held the golden sand in my hand. They show me in my true light—of the earth earthy, sordid, and prone to temptation, when it held out the prospect of pleasures and gratified vanity.

“In exceptional moments, such as those I am describing, this lower self whispers cunningly and urges to unworthy action; but only for a time; for soon my better self asserts itself, and thrusts out of sight that worser half of man which too often leads to his destruction.

CHAPTER XIII.

RANF COMPLETES HIS DIARY.

“It was so in this instance. The figure of the wealthy and uglier hunchback than I, who, when I was battling with the world, had summoned me to his presence for the purpose of sucking consolation out of my deformity, rose before me. The lesson I had learned on the memorable night he introduced me to his guests for the purpose of showing me the power of gold—a lesson far different from that he wished to teach—I now took to heart. The words I had addressed to him I addressed to myself. Lip-service his gold could buy—heart-service, never; and I remembered how the keen arrow pierced his soul when I asked him where, in spite of all his wealth, was the woman who in her dreams would breathe his name in accents of love. In the light of this re-

membrance my exultation in my discovery took a worthier shape, and I felt that it was impossible that I should ever become the slave of gold.

“Not for myself did I rejoice in the gold by which I was surrounded. For whom, then? For whom but for one being, to whom it might possibly bring an added happiness? For whom but for Evangeline?”

“But presently an unexpected consideration intruded itself. Was it certain that the metal was really gold? Might it not be a baser metal, of no worldly account? I smiled at the thought, and the absence of any feeling of disappointment was a proof that I had gained a moral victory.

“There was, however, no other metal that would answer the description of the substance I held in my hand, and of the value of which, after the doubt had passed away, I was in my own mind convinced. For its presence in so strange a place I was puzzled to account; but upon reflection it occurred to me that some of the hidden rocks which lay beneath the sea along the shore might be auriferous. In that case, the mystery was solved.

“The wealth which met my eyes was enormous — impossible to calculate. I gathered a quantity of the precious particles from the crevices of the rocks, and placed it high up, out of the reach of the waves. It was evening when I first made the discovery, but I did not suspend my labour until night had so fully set in that there was no light to guide me—by which time I had collected as much gold as I could carry to my mountain hut. Not only the darkness of the night, but the sound of the waves, which told me that the tide was rising again, warned me to desist. I determined to pass the night on the rocks above, and in the morning to make a more careful examination of the wonderful cave. It was necessary that I should reach a place of safety at once, and I commenced to climb the rocks. I was full of courage and spirit and energy, but I was over-confident, and, doubtless, also over-excited, for in an effort to raise myself, when I was about twenty feet above the level of the shore, I slipped, and fell to the bottom of the cave, cutting myself so severely and losing so much blood that I became insensible.

“In this perilous position I lay without

consciousness until surrounding circumstances awoke my mind. Sweet voices were about me, whispering of the sea, of Evangeline, and of all that was most pleasant to me. The wild turmoil of living was over, and I was floating into an eternity of rest. An eternity soon to be broken by a furious struggle for dear life. The tide was rising fast, and the waves were beginning to wash over me. Then ensued a battle from which I had scarcely a hope of escaping; but despair and the desire for life gave me strength, and I managed to cling to the rocks and prevent myself from being carried out to sea. But I have to thank fortune for victory, for my strength was almost spent and my breath almost gone as a wave drew me outwards to the spot where the brown belts of seaweed reared and curled; quickly it returned, and by a happy chance washed me inwards towards the Cross, into an arm of which it mercifully flung me, leaving me for a brief space in safety. I took advantage of the precious moments, and before the next wave rolled into the cave I succeeded in climbing another foot or two up the Cross, and so inch by inch at length succeeded in reaching the beam on which

the arms of the sacred figure were extended. Then fixing myself in such a position as to render it unlikely that I could be dislodged, my strength finally gave way, and I became once more insensible.

“There is no need here to describe the night which followed, its interminable length, and the strange fancies and images the roar and flash of the waves, whose breasts were illuminated with phosphorescent light, created for me. When the sun arose the tide was going down, and it was only then I discovered how weak I was. I had left on the rocks above the food I had brought with me, and it was almost by a miracle I was enabled to gain the spot; in this attempt I became still more sorely wounded, and it was with dismay I thought that many days must elapse before I should be able to gain sufficient strength to crawl to my hut on the mountain. What distressed me most was the reflection that if I was absent for longer than fourteen days the record I had written would fall too early into Margaret Sylvester’s hands, in accordance with the instructions I had given Evangeline. It was necessary, therefore, that I should

arrive home (the mere thought of the word, associated as it was with Evangeline and the dumb animals I loved, brought with it a feeling of tenderness) before Evangeline had cut the last notch in the branch I gave her; and to this end it behoved me to nurse myself and not exhaust my strength in rash attempts to accomplish what was physically out of my power.

“Nature favoured me in many ways. The salt water helped to stop the bleeding of my wounds, and by great efforts I managed to crawl to a basin higher up the mountain, supplied with fresh water by a waterfall from the ice-clad peaks. The time passed wearily; inaction was like death to me; but gradually my wounds were sufficiently healed to enable me to move with some freedom, and, bearing with me a portion of the gold I had collected in the cave, on the fourteenth day I reached my highest hut.

“Nothing had been disturbed; the book in which my record was made was safe. I was content and grateful.

“I directed my steps to the lower hut, where my birds and animals were, and long before I was within sight of it Leontine

leaped upon me in unbridled delight. The dog licked my face and hands, and whined for joy. I am not ashamed to say I kissed the faithful creature. Such a welcome home was not to be despised.

“ ‘ You are not alone, Leontine,’ I said, looking into the dog’s eyes ; ‘ your mistress is below.’ ”

“ Leontine understood me, and running before me, with joyous barks, and running back to express her joy again at my return, made Evangeline aware that I was coming towards her.

“ She stood at the door, and at sight of me turned as white as death. By that I knew that the danger I had escaped had left its mark upon me.

“ ‘ It is nothing, Evangeline,’ I said, in a cheery tone ; ‘ a mere scratch. I have been exploring the mountain, and had a tumble. Men can bear that sort of thing ; they laugh at bodily wounds and hurts. Think of what Joseph bore for you.’ ”

“ ‘ I know,’ said Evangeline, with compassionate glances at me, ‘ but this is something more. You look as if you had just walked out of your grave.’ ”

“ ‘It is not so,’ I said, with a gay laugh, ‘and I hope it will be long before the opportunity is afforded me. There is nothing to be alarmed at; I am tough as granite. And all has gone well with you since I saw you? How many days is it since?’ ”

“ She showed me the branch; the fourteenth notch had been cut in it. Joseph was at the foot of the mountain, she told me, and taking her hand I went to greet the lad. He, too, was startled at my appearance, but when I made light of my wounds and laughed at them, he laughed with me; and between us we set Evangeline at her ease. My animals and birds had been well cared for, and I thanked Evangeline for the faithful performance of the task I had given her. Then I drew Joseph aside.

“ ‘Have you seen any more creatures climbing up the mountain side?’ I asked.

“ ‘Only you,’ replied Joseph.

“ ‘In the daylight?’ ”

“ ‘No; at night. I have been out on the sea, alone, for the purpose of looking at you.’ ”

“ I laughed; the lad had but gratified a

harmless curiosity, and I was satisfied that he would not betray or deceive me, supposing it were even in his power to do so.

“ ‘Then you have discovered,’ I said, ‘that I no longer climb the rocks in daylight.’ The lad nodded. ‘I have never seen the mountain from the sea,’ I continued; ‘would it be safe, seawards, to approach it?’

“ ‘It would be impossible,’ replied Joseph, ‘for a boat to live three minutes in the breakers on the coast-line there, they are so terrible and treacherous. It is for that reason I have been afraid for you.’

“ ‘If I slipped and fell,’ I said, ‘and even then had some life remaining, you could not assist me from the sea?’

“ ‘Not I,’ said Joseph, ‘nor the best sailor that ever sailed the seas. Why do you risk your life?’

“ ‘I am fond of dangerous enterprises, and as for this climbing, there is but small risk in it to a man who can climb like a goat. Joseph, you can enlighten me. There is a woman on this isle of the name of Bertha.’

“‘A woman who has lost her wits?’ asked Joseph.

“‘Yes; to some extent, I should say. What do you know of her?’

“‘Nothing; I am forbidden to speak to her.’

“‘Forbidden by whom?’

“‘By the islanders.’

“‘For what reason?’

“‘I cannot tell you.’

“‘Does your mother know her?’

“‘She has never spoken to me of her; no one in the isle holds communion with her, I believe; she goes her way alone.’

“I had asked out of more than an idle curiosity; I had a deep compassion for this sorrowing woman, who lived a life of loneliness among those who had tossed her in their arms and nursed her on their knees when she was a child; and I had hoped to find a larger charity in the men and women of the Silver Isle than was to be met with in the old world. ‘She goes her way alone.’ Poor Bertha! But she has the spirit of her child to comfort her.

“Shortly afterwards a brig cast anchor

in the bay, and when the captain had concluded his business with the islanders I stood with him, by appointment, alone upon the sea-shore. He had executed some commissions for me, for which I had paid him in silver from Mauvain's mine, which I have the privilege of working, but shall work no longer, and I had determined, through him, to prove the true value of the discovery I had made.

"I pretended to be searching in the sand for something I had dropped, and he regarded me with an amused air, being used to my moods, and humouring them for the profit he made out of me.

" 'What are you looking for, hunch-back?' he asked.

" 'For a man I can trust,' I replied.

" 'What kind of man?'

" 'An honest man.'

" 'Give it up; wiser than you have searched in vain.'

"I shrugged my shoulders, and said,—

" 'You make no pretensions to honesty; I must needs content myself with you. I would sooner trust you than one who protests.'

“ ‘Here am I, Old Honesty, for sale. How much will you give for me ? ’

“ I took from a wallet I carried over my arm a small box, and said,

“ ‘Hold this a moment.’

“ He almost dropped it, its weight being unexpected.

“ ‘It is as heavy,’ he said, ‘as lead.’

“ ‘Or gold,’ I said. As I spoke I looked about me cautiously, as though fearful of being observed or overheard. The captain changed colour. ‘Step aside a little,’ I said; ‘no one but you must learn my secret. Now open the box.’

“ His eyes glistened at the sight of the gold.

“ ‘Virgin gold !’ he cried ; ‘as I am a living man !’

“ ‘I buy you, Old Honesty,’ I said, ‘and you must keep my secret. Listen. When I first came to this isle the islanders did not know whether I was rich or poor ; it was a matter of small interest to them, and as for my gold—of which you hold only a small portion in your hand—it was of no value to me here. Nor did I think it ever would be—’

“The captain interrupted me.

“‘Stop. Your story must be told understandingly. Did you come honestly by this gold?’

“‘Do you come honestly by your bread?’

“‘Yes; every mouthful of it.’

“‘So did I come honestly by this gold; every grain of it. That it is mine never made, nor ever will make, any man the poorer. But no man knows I have it, nor would I have any man know it but you. Is my answer straight enough?’

“‘It sounds so. Go on with your story.’

“‘I did not think the gold would ever be of value to me here. But I have my fancies, and they have taken a golden turn. There is a maid upon this isle—Evangeline—growing to womanhood, whom I love, and in whom I take a pride—’

“He interrupted me again.

“‘Stop once more. When I called myself Old Honesty I was not quite in jest, nor was it entirely out of vanity or boastfulness. I am Old Honesty. Do you mark me, hunchback?’

“‘Aye,’ I said coldly, ‘and I shall be

able to prove you. If I had not thought you were honest, I should not have been fool enough to trust you.'

" 'Well, then, I must be thoroughly satisfied before I work with you or for you. To profit by a thief's gold is to take wages from the devil.'

" 'How many thousands fatten upon such wages ?'

" 'I am not good at arithmetic. You want me to keep your secret, and I will, if it is a proper one to keep ; not otherwise. Swear by the life of this little maid, Evangeline—as sweet a damsel as ever sailor set eyes on—that the gold is honestly come by, and I'll say nothing more.'

" Truly, I thought, this man of many words must have his way, and I took the oath with a clear conscience ; which for the time appeared to satisfy him, for he allowed me to continue without further needless interruption.

" 'As I was saying, my fancies have taken a golden turn with respect to my maid. I would not instil useless vanities into her head, but when she becomes a woman I would have it in my power to offer her what I would like to offer her

were I in the old world instead of the new. My gold is useless to me in its natural form, but it may be changed for laces, silks, diamonds, and such-like adornments in which ladies delight. This is the commission I propose that you shall accept from me, leaving it to your taste, or better still to the taste of some lady of your acquaintance, to make such selection as will best answer my whim and purpose. The reasons for my wishing to have this kept a secret between us is first, that I do not care to let it be known that I am rich, and next, that I desire to have it in my power to one day surprise my little maid with a box of treasures likely to afford her pleasure. What say you now to my story ?’

“ ‘It winds up prettily, and I ask your pardon for my suspicions. I will execute your commission, and it shall be a matter only between ourselves. Do you know the exact weight of this gold ?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘He cried in astonishment, ‘And you leave everything to my honour !’

“ ‘To your honesty—better than honour, a word with slippery meanings. The gold

I have given you, however, will go but a little way in the purchase of what I need. Delay your departure until the morning, and at midnight meet me here, and I will give you more.'

"He consented, and at midnight we met again, when I gave him a small bag of gold; he brought with him weights and scales (calling them 'armour for honesty,' and staring at me when I said that honesty needed no armour), with which he weighed the gold. Its weight altogether was twenty-four pounds and some odd ounces. The captain expected to return to the isle in six months, and during his absence I was not idle. I made hiding-places in the rocks for the gold I collected, and took great pains in making the descent to the caves of easier accomplishment; but had I worked upon it all my life, none but stout hearts, or those who had a great stake at issue, would have dared to venture it.

"The captain was not as good as his word. It was nearly a year before he returned, and I did him the injustice of thinking temptation too strong for him. It troubled him, too, he told me, when after his long absence, we met once more.

“ ‘The brig is not my own,’ he said ; ‘I am under orders.’

“ ‘I may ask you one day,’ I said, ‘to change employers. There are more unlikely things than that I may buy a vessel and offer you the command.’

“ ‘Time enough,’ he replied, ‘to speak of that when it happens ; I think we could get along together.’

“ Then he asked me to accompany him to the brig, and he would show me the purchases he had made. He unlocked a strong trunk which stood in his cabin, and drew out old laces and new silks and a necklace of pearls and diamonds. I took pleasure in their contemplation, and in my fancy saw Evangeline dressed like a lady in the old world ; and as I thought of Evangeline I thought also of Clarice, and wondered whether she lived. But my greatest satisfaction was derived from the confirmation afforded by these purchases of the value of my discovery. Truly there was no bound (except the years which measure life) to the prospect before me. Nothing now was beyond my power ; there was not a wish I could not gratify, and for a time I was be-

wildered by the possibilities which lay in the future.

“‘Come,’ said the captain, ‘let us square accounts.’

“He was scrupulous in them, paying himself fairly, with the remark that sometimes honesty paid almost as well as roguery. I gave him other commissions and more gold, and he is now absent attending to them.

“Before I close these pages for good, I must make mention of Bertha. For a long time I did not visit the market-place, and one night I saw her at the foot of the mountain.

“‘I told you I should come and see you,’ she said; ‘you have been away so long that I thought you were dead. Why have you kept from me?’

“I replied that I had been busy and ill, and she said I ought to have sent for her.

“‘It is dreadful to be alone,’ she said, ‘when one is sick in body or soul. I should have come to you had I known. I should not have cared what they said of me—they could not say anything worse than they have already done. I

am alone, as you are. Do you heed people's cruel words ?'

" 'No.'

" 'Nor shall I. They have almost broken my heart—they shall not make me suffer any longer. See—I have brought you some flowers from my baby's grave.'

"I took the flowers from her hand; they were crushed and withered. Nothing would satisfy her but my promise to come to the market-place the following night. I kept my promise, and I left her, as on the previous occasions, whispering to her child through the cold earth. I am animated by the sincerest pity for her lonely life. We meet now every week; it has grown into a habit; and Bertha sometimes calls me brother.

"So now I write my last words. My last words! If it were really so, and death were to summon me this night, there are those on the Silver Isle who would shed tears over my grave."

CHAPTER XIV.

MAUVAIN RETURNS TO THE SILVER ISLE.

IN the year 1848 an unusual circumstance occurred in the Silver Isle. Within the space of a fortnight two vessels anchored in the bay. The first was a regular trader to the isle, and had frequently visited it; the second cast its anchor for the first time in the beautiful waters which surrounded the isle, and its captain was a stranger to the inhabitants.

It was not without uneasiness that the islanders watched the approach of the second vessel. It had never occurred that these white-winged visitors from the old world trod so closely upon each other's heels. There had always been a lapse of several months between the visits, and—especially to the older residents—any deviation from regular custom was seldom agreeable. But apart from these considerations, there was another reason

why the approach of the strange vessel was observed with anxiety.

The captain with whom they were acquainted, and who had only just left them, had brought them news of a fearful convulsion in the country of the old world of which he was a citizen. A terrible crisis had occurred in the history of his land. The people had risen upon their masters, and had hurled them from their high places; the lives of those who made and administered the laws were jeopardized, and in many instances had been sacrificed by the wild passions of a bloody-minded populace, whose worst impulses were brought into play; decency, restraint, and order were cast aside; religion was mocked at and its priests insulted; mad ideas of equality were being promulgated, and visionaries and fanatics, and those whose warped and astute intellects could use these for their purpose, declared that the time had come for a new distribution of property. To lead the way to this, the prisons had been thrown open, and the vilest criminals had been let loose upon society, one or two unfortunate miscarriages of justice being held sufficient for the

flowing of this tide; old rights were disregarded, and insanely-flattering theories were dangled before weak and ignorant masses, inflaming them with visions of an impossible Utopia. The streets were red with blood, and decent people were afraid to venture out of their houses. Wealth and wine and fine linen were henceforth to be the property of all, especially the property of those who did not own them. The millennium of the wretched and needy had arrived. The rich might go hang. There were to be no more rich—except the poor. It was the era of topsy-turvydom in property and morals. By a common process of reasoning (which now and again in social convulsions glares for a moment, to be extinguished almost instantly by a better light), to be born rich was looked upon as a crime; and success, also, was a wrong to those who struggled or idled (particularly to the latter) and who had never reaped fair harvest.

More than ever grateful were the islanders for the peace and order which reigned in their land. The pictures drawn by their friend awoke their compassion for him,

and they proposed that he should stay among them ; he declined.

“I have duties elsewhere,” he said ; “I must look after my wife and children. We must stand by our homesteads.”

And then again he descanted upon the misfortunes into which his country was plunged, and harrowed the hearts of the islanders with his stories.

“I never believed in the divine right of kings,” he said, “but a ship must have its captain, call him what you will, king or president or any other name you choose ; and the captain and its officers must know their business, or their vessel will get into the rapids or on the rocks. You have reason to thank Heaven that you are free from such fevers as I have described. You can live your lives in peace and security, and can enjoy the fruits of your labour. These wretches would wrest them not only from you, but from your children. You are not surrounded by a pack of mongrels ready to snatch the bone from your mouth. Right is right, and there is rich man’s right as well as poor man’s right. That is what some do not or will not understand. At this moment hundreds of

innocent persons are hiding in cellars and garrets and caves, awaiting in despair the opportunity to escape from the unreasoning fury of their fellow-creatures. It makes my blood boil to think of it. So you would give me welcome among you ? ”

“ Yes,” they answered, “ you and yours.”

“ Well, I can but thank you, and if necessity compel, I will take advantage of your offer. It is no small temptation to a man to be offered the opportunity of bringing up his children in virtue and peace.”

So the captain, whose name was Raphael, bade them farewell, and took his departure.

Happily, thought the islanders, our isle is but little known, and they almost regretted that a ship had ever visited it ; for although they were not inhospitable, they believed it would be an evil day for them upon which men with new ideas came among them. What more did men want than enough ? To work, to rest, to thank Heaven for health and food, to live in virtue and cleanliness, to enjoy what Nature with

liberal hand held out to them—this was their gospel of earth, to which they added the spiritual Gospel of trust and hope in God. What greater calamity could happen to them than for this happy state to be disturbed? Therefore it was when, within three days after the departure of the first vessel, a second made its appearance over the distant sea-line, its white sails swelling to the Silver Isle, that its approach was viewed with feelings of uneasiness.

“What brings this stranger to the Silver Isle?” said the islanders, and they spoke of sending out a boat to inquire the business of the unexpected visitor.

On the deck of the vessel stood two men, close to the bulwarks, their eyes fixed upon the land. One was in the prime of life, the other a man whose hair was fast growing white. They were both handsome and distinguished; but there was a worn look in their eyes, as though they had passed through some recent trouble. For some time they gazed in silence; then the younger of the men spoke.

“ It seems but yesterday ! ”

“ Eh ? ” cried his companion, who did not hear the observation, and thought it addressed to him.

“ It seems but yesterday,” repeated the younger man, “ that I first visited this happy isle. I passed some delicious moments lying on tumbled hay in a field where men and women were working ; I thought I was in Arcadia ; and I remember well the walk to the market-place, over the hill-slopes and between hedges of barberry and roses. I can trace the perfume of syringa at this moment.”

“ You were ever a rhapsodist. This isle is a happy one if happiness is to be found in stagnation. *I* was surfeited with it. When I lived here—how many years ago ?—a lifetime, it seems—I was fit to die of lassitude. But time brings changes.” He frowned at this, thinking of the changes time had brought to him. He was a fugitive when he first sought shelter within the peaceful land ; he was a fugitive now ; but, then, the future, an earthly future, was before him ; he was scarcely in his prime ; now, his hair was whitening, and nature was whispering, “ Your time is coming ;

the earth is waiting for you." He brushed these thoughts away; it was his habit to rid himself of unpleasant reflection, and to this may be ascribed the circumstance that, though he was old enough for them, there were but few wrinkles in his handsome face. "It is to be hoped," he continued, "that the inhabitants have grown more amenable to reason."

"To what end, Mauvain?"

"To the end of a proper enjoyment of life."

"According to your understanding of it."

"It is not to be doubted," said Mauvain, "who is the better judge, they or I."

"For my part, I never had the inclination to teach other creatures how to enjoy, believing they had promptings of their own. I regard Nature as perfect; I have no doubt you find imperfections in her. It appeared to me that the inhabitants of the Silver Isle had a fair enjoyment of life."

"They may have, in their way."

"Then the end is served; a thankless task to try and improve upon it."

"One must do something with his days. You are happily constituted; the flight of

a butterfly is food enough for your indolent soul; but I cannot lie down and dream the hours away."

"If my impressions are correct, the men of the isle have wills of their own."

"Then," said Mauvain, with a smile, "we must try and convince the women."

The younger man smiled also, but the smile almost instantly died from his lips. "You have had a larger experience than I," he said; "mine was but a fleeting view, and when beauty is first presented to me something within me prevents me from staring it out of countenance. The women of the isle are fair."

"Very fair; I am afraid when I lived here I scarcely did them justice."

"Mauvain, I will make a confession to you. I have not been fortunate with women hitherto."

"It is at once a confession and revelation. Your friends think otherwise."

"My friends flatter me; I never merited their good opinion, being in that respect like many luckier dogs than myself, who are better thought of than they deserve. Do you know, Mauvain, there has ever been in my heart an unsatisfied longing?

The days have glided on smoothly enough. There have been laughter, music, flowers, fair and gracious women, sweet protestations, and sometimes sweeter tears, old wine and young beauty in their full ripeness. These should be sufficient for a man, and are, for most ; they have not been for me. Sometimes the flowers have faded in my hand or as I inhaled their fragrance ; sometimes the music jarred or I heard in it the discordant laughter of a disappointed hope ; sometimes I saw wrinkles in the fairest face. They have not brought to me what I have yearned for in my heart of hearts."

"What have you yearned for, Harold ? Describe it."

"Difficult, if not impossible, for it springs not so much from others as from an unsatisfied longing of the soul. The wind has whispered it, the leaves have murmured it ; I have seen it in the gloaming."

"You are poetizing, Harold, as I have heard you do a hundred times before, or you have lied terribly."

"If I must choose between the two, I have lied terribly. Ah, the smiling, gracious

women! ‘Am I fair?’ ‘You are beautiful.’ ‘Do you love me?’ ‘With all my soul.’ ‘Swear that you will never love another!’ ‘I swear it!’ Is not that the way the comedy goes? I fall back upon a morsel of your own philosophy—one must do something with his days—and though, unlike you (to be unlike you in anything is to be at a disadvantage), I am fond of dreaming, the world will not always give you leisure. A bouquet is to be bought, a white wrist is held out for the fastening of a glove, a note has to be read and answered. I am continuing the comedy, Mauvain. Nature made me my own enemy. There is something distressingly responsive in my outward self; my features have a trick of becoming sympathetic, without regard to my wishes. A woman smiles upon me, and displays her white teeth—there is a world of love in the well-shaped mouth; her eyes look languishingly into mine; I return her smile; my eyes melt in the light of hers; she presses my hand—ah! the soft velvet palms! what have they not to answer for! I press hers; and so the comedy proceeds; but my heart plays no part in it. It is as cold as stone.”

"Absolutely?" said Mauvain, in an amused tone.

"Absolutely," said Harold, in a serious tone.

"Harold, you charm me out of myself, and cause me to forget events which have made us fugitives from our native land."

"I am happy to be of use."

"Have you subjected this comedy of yours to criticism?"

"I have searched and examined it learnedly and severely, and I have always condemned it."

"Then have you been a most insincere actor, having played in it so often in a mask which no man—or woman—saw."

"Admitted. But how different has it been with you! You have entered heart and soul into your pleasures. Life for you has been a jewelled cup, into which love flowed as often as you drained it; and you drained it often, Mauvain, and with zest."

"You have envied me."

"Never. I would not have changed with you; I would not change with you. For if it happen, as it may, that that for which I yearn come within my reach, I shall taste a joy it is impossible for you ever to have known, ever to know!"

“Coxcomb!” exclaimed Mauvain. “But you are right, perhaps, in that part of your hypothesis which applies to the future. Alas! you have thirty years the advantage of me. What would I give for those thirty years!”

“You are fond of life, Mauvain.”

“I worship it, and deplore the days that pass too quickly by. Yes; I am fond of life, and use it to its proper end. Nature bestows it, and says, Enjoy. I obey; I open my heart and soul to the pleasure to be derived from all life, animate and inanimate, which surrounds me, and like the bee I live on what is fairest.”

“And sink to earth, clogged with sweetness.”

“What, then? It is not death; nature recuperates, and bids you enjoy once more. Ungrateful to refuse. It is the only true philosophy. I have loved a hundred times. Nature in me has a most devout admirer, and when spring comes round I open my heart to it. Youth—which means beauty, Harold—has an irresistible attraction to me. Ah, if I possessed it in my own person! If it could be bought!”

“There are such fables.”

“That is the misfortune of it—they are

fables. I must die one day, I suppose. If I could choose the time and manner of my death, I would die in spring, with evidences of beauty's birth around me."

"Would it not be better," said Harold grimly, "to die surrounded by wintry aspects? One could say good-bye with greater equanimity. Mauvain, I am curious upon certain matters. You will pardon me if I continue speaking on a theme I find fascinating."

"Certainly. The theme is—"

"You, Mauvain—yourself, your nature, motives, inner life; for years you have fascinated me."

"You are entertaining me with a succession of surprises, Harold. You have made a study of me, then?"

"In my idle way, Mauvain, I have made a study of you."

"Give me some idea of myself—for of course you know me thoroughly."

"Most thoroughly, I think," said Harold listlessly; "but I will wait for a more appropriate opportunity to satisfy your curiosity. In the meantime, satisfy mine."

"Proceed; you will not overstep the line."

“That divides us? No; I will not overstep it. Mauvain, you and I know something of each other; we have shared danger and pleasure together. How many adventures have we been engaged in! Light enterprises undertaken to put life into dull hours! And always successful, Mauvain. However small the whim, it was gratified, never mind at what expense to others.”

“Do you intend,” said Mauvain, “to drag the whole world into your exordium?”

“Heaven forbid! Every man for himself; every woman, too; but she generally is.”

“I have found it so.”

“Selfish to the backbone; cunning; artful; but unfortunately for herself, weak.”

“Not always, Harold,” said Mauvain, following with but an idle attention the current of his companion’s spoken thoughts. “These weak creatures are capable of much that a man would shrink from. Given to each equal scope and opportunity, I would sooner incur the hatred of three men than of one woman.”

“Yes, we learn these lessons; but a

woman can be persuaded; her nature is gracious; man's is brutal. There is a weapon which, skilfully used, is stronger than woman's whole artillery. That weapon is flattery. You have used it, Mauvain, with effect. True, that woman is capable of much; self-sacrifice, for one thing. Then she has faith; man has not. You follow me, Mauvain?"

"For the life of me, Harold, I cannot see where you are drifting."

"Aptly said. Nor can I; but I have been drifting ever since I can remember, being governed by accidental moods."

Mauvain turned his eyes with languid interest upon the face of his friend, saying, "I do believe you are speaking in earnest."

"If so, it must be accidental, for such a man as I cannot but be barren of serious intention."

"Seriousness is a mistake. He is the wisest who is the least serious."

"Then folly is wisdom."

"Fools are the most serious of men."

"It is a pleasure to converse with a man of intellect; therein lies part of your fascination."

"One who did not know you as well as

I do, Harold, would suppose you had a direct motive in your compliments."

"I have a motive, Mauvain; I wish you, in honest truth, to answer me one question."

"A hundred, Harold."

"I will not tax you. It is a question concerning woman. Of all the women you have loved, whom did you love the best?"

"Of all the days I have enjoyed," retorted Mauvain, "which did I enjoy the most? Of all the dinners I have eaten—and so on, and so on. Harold, I cannot answer you, for a sufficient reason."

"The reason being—"

"That I do not know; and indeed, if I did, to express preference for one would be to wrong the others."

"Think a moment, Mauvain. Is there not one to whom, in looking back, your heart turns and acknowledges before all others?"

"One! there are a dozen! Are you answered now?"

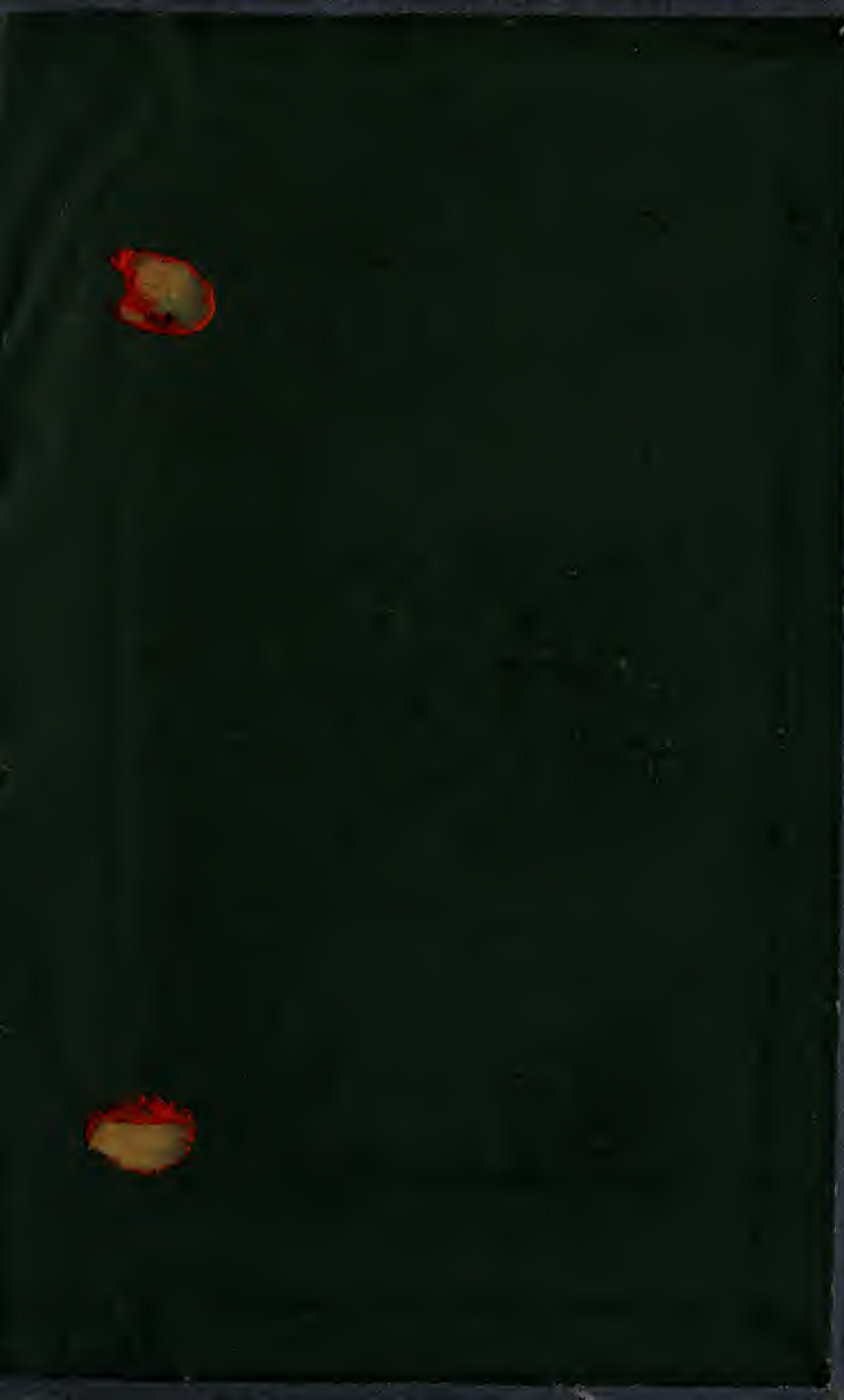
"Yes; and I thank you. You have a light spirit, Mauvain; you were created for enjoyment. My last voyage to this fair isle was not made in such agreeable company. Perhaps you forget what you said

to me when you proposed the trip. When a man was surfeited with the sweets or disgusted with the buffets of the world, you said, the Silver Isle was the land to come to, to spin out what remained of the days of his life. Without premeditation, you justify your words. In the Silver Isle, said you, dwells the spirit of simplicity. Well, we shall have time to search for it."

"And if it present itself to you in the shape of a beautiful girl!"

"I shall fall at her feet and worship her. Would not you?"

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